

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION  
OF THE  
CITY OF LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE  
HELD May 27, 2008**

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

Chairman Cahill called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

**II. ROLL CALL:**

Present were Commissioners Cahill, Gelhaar and Davitt, Deputy City Attorney Vargas, Senior Planner Buss, Planner Gjolme and Planning Consultant Cantrell. Director Stanley and Commissioner Mehranian were absent.

**III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Commissioner Hill led the salute to the flag.

**IV. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Comments were not offered.

**V. REORDERING OF THE AGENDA**

Chairman Cahill asked that item VIII-C, Parcel Map 063622; La Canada School District; request for time extension, be heard first and IX-A, Draft 2008-09 Capital Improvement Plan - conformance with General Plan, be heard second. There were no objections from his colleagues.

**VI. CONSENT CALENDAR**

A. Minutes of May 13, 2008 was not submitted.

**VII. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

**A. Hillside Development Permit 06-44, Setback Modification 06-54, Second-floor Review 08-11; Avedian; 1936 Hilldale Drive:**

Planning Consultant, Cantrell reported on the applicant's request for a Hillside Development Permit and Second-floor Review to allow construction of a new 3,200 sf house upon a hillside lot. Additionally, a Modification is requested for a substandard front yard setback and for reduced second-floor side yard setbacks at the rear corners of the house.

The site is on the south side of Hilldale Drive, near the east end of its long block overlooking Verdugo Boulevard; the site is a 9,374 sf area.

The proposed two-story home would be viewed from the street as a one-story structure with the second-floor built below it and the full two-story height viewed from the neighborhood below. This is consistent with the tradition on the south side of Hilldale in contrast to the taller structure at 1940 Hilldale Dr.

The homes are high enough on the north side of Hilldale Drive , so the views aren't threatened by the houses on the south side of the street, and that is the case for the house across from the subject property. He mentioned that it would be one story from the street with the second-floor revealing itself from the view below.

Unlike 1940 Hilldale Drive, the subject site at 1936 Hilldale Drive has no appreciable pad area beyond a minimal front setback. To keep the downslope wall and overall building heights within the hillside height limit, a higher back yard is proposed through the introduction of a retaining wall.

Despite the house's low profile from the street, its 12 ft side yard setbacks would be less than the code requirement at the rear corners where descending grade has been exploited through the insertion of a lower story. The resulting two-story configuration would have a side yard setback requirement of 16 ft.

Staff has determined that the project would not introduce any detrimental environmental effects, and has prepared a Negative Declaration for adoption in conjunction with approval of the Hillside Development Permit, Modification, and Second-Floor Review requests. Based on the discussions and related findings, staff has concluded that, as conditioned, the proposal is reasonably designed and scaled in relation to its hillside site, including its setbacks and two-story configuration. Staff recommends that the Hillside Development Permit, Modification, and Second-Floor Review be approved, subject to the conditions of the draft resolution.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Hill, father of the owner, Leo Avedian advised that the large pit in the front is a well that was drained for percolation testing, which was okay; they wanted to find out about the percolation and resistance of the soil.

Commissioner Gelhaar stated that his problem is the retaining wall; looking from down below and as steep as it is, 41 ft is not acceptable. The bindings required in terms of the view from below, he can't make the required findings with the retaining wall, but could make the required findings without it.

Commissioner Hill agrees with Commissioner Gelhaar, he thinks the retaining wall is a real problem with no good way to hide it.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Davitt, Planning Consultant Cantrell advised that the amended, revised landscaping plan was intended to require the retaining wall to have some curvature that corresponded to the natural slope and to have spillover planting.

Commissioner Davitt agrees with Commissioners Gelhaar and Hill, he thinks the retaining wall is problematic and it would be his preference if a re-design could be done without it.

Chairman Cahill stated that he has a similar reaction he doesn't like the retaining wall, but can offer an opportunity for the applicant to re-design without a retaining wall.

Planning Consultant Cantrell, suggested making an approval with the condition that the retaining wall not be a part of the project.

M/S/C Gelhaar/Hill to approve Hillside Development Permit 06-44, Setback Modification 06-54, Second-floor Review 08-11; Avedian; 1936 Hilldale Drive with added condition to exclude the retaining wall. Unanimous.

## **IX. PUBLIC HEARINGS**

### **B. Variance 08-03, 08-04, 08-05; 2 Sport Chalet Drive, 901 Foothill Blvd., Town Center Project Area - northeast corner of Foothill Blvd. and Angeles Crest Hwy**

Planning Consultant, Cantrell reported that the project was approved by the City Council in August of 2006. Since that time, the Design Commission approved the project for design in January 2007. The Design Commission also conducted a favorable advisory sign review in March of 2007, to be used as guidance for the Planning Commission during its subsequent review of the Variance(s).

Staff has gone through the submittal, building by building in connection with the sign ordinance as well as particular design concerns. Some signage that is shown isn't considered a part of the variance, especially where awning valance signs are shown; those are bonus signs as are some vertical banner signs.

The project is a reasonable proposal that exceeds code in some instances due to the Sign Ordinance being more oriented toward shopping centers that are more typical of earlier development and include tenants with single frontages. The scale of the shopping center is a street wall type of development, which is much different from the typical shopping center of the past; it's not eligible for letter height bonuses based on distance from the boulevard and its location at the center of town attains a scale that the City has deemed appropriate. Combined with a lack of setbacks from the street, which the City has also deemed desirable, it suffers the letter height limitations of the ordinance as well as spatial allowances in the Sign Ordinance that do not take into account fully developed four-sided buildings.

Aside from buildings A & B, which have specific tenants and specific signs shown, the rest of the signs are shown schematically as rectangles; the City's

sign ordinance doesn't count them merely as rectangles, it's more sophisticated and the assumption is that the individual sign will comprise less area than the corresponding rectangles. Staff calculations reveal a 9% excess in terms of total sign area. Consulting planner Cantrell strongly recommended looking at the drawings and to evaluate the look and scale of the signs relative to the scale of the buildings rather than a solely numeric evaluation.

Planner Cantrell outlined the specific proposals for buildings A & B and the conceptual proposals for buildings C-G and the parking structure. Staff concluded that the findings can be made for approval of the Variance, and recommends that the request be approved, subject to the conditions

Responding to a question by Chairman Cahill as to the exact parameters of the sign area excesses, Consultant Cantrell confirmed that there was not necessarily a request in the variance for oversized signs on any buildings other than the Sports Chalet and Home Goods. The Variance specifically allows for the building A & B excesses and conceptual deviations in terms of sign number and possibly letter height for the other buildings.

Staff agreed with this assessment and the Commission concluded that the Sign Ordinance cannot effectively regulate a project of this scale and that the requested Variances were reasonable.

Chairman Cahill noted that the variance contained a number of requests that were bundled into one request. He noted that the square footage of the signage for Sports Chalet and Home Goods combined fell generally within the limits of the ordinance, but that there was implicitly a request for considerably more signage area for the other buildings in the project. He was in favor of approving the signage requests relating to the Sports Chalet, Home Goods and the monument signs, but that he is opposed to any grant of additional signage square footage for any of the other buildings.

Project lead applicant Darren Mattix explained the sign "placeholder" concept in greater detail and clarified that the area requested is simply what the Sign Ordinance would allow if it accounted for "4-sided architecture" - independent structures with four fully developed elevations as opposed to buildings with single frontages that the Sign Ordinance typically deals with.

Resident of Alveo Road, Ken Deans stated that he hadn't seen a whole lot of paperwork sent to residents about this and it is confused and disturbed by what he heard, a company that reneged on taking care of the road and the City paid for that. He doesn't understand why it would be considered to add more/bigger signage and questioned if there an economic reason to the City.

In response to Resident Deans question, Commissioner Cahill stated that it is the applicant's request, not a City request.

Resident Deans stated that he understood, but as a resident of the City, one that would be quite comfortable putting up a gate up at Ocean View and Oak Grove. As we discussed this thing in the beginning, going to the high school when we first moved here 12 years ago, we don't want this City to be a destination City. I don't understand why you need bigger signage for a place that people are coming to, it doesn't make any sense. You are either going to the town center or you're not; you're either going to look at the directory or know the store you are going to or not. He reiterated that he doesn't understand the need to make the signs bigger and he can't imagine them being aesthetically pleasing, it just doesn't make sense. He has to drive through this town everyday and asked if the contractor does. This is where his children live, this is not a commercial site, we're a community and it should stay that way. He sees no reason on earth why they should need any larger signs at all.

Project lead applicant Darren Mattix commented that the downtown village specific plan itself overlays the area in what the community's desires are in terms of retail and commercial vibrancy. The Design Commission and we have worked very hard to create the kind of scale and architecture that will be visually appealing; it's not a unified design appearance and contains many different types of architecture. The scale of the signage has been proposed is appropriate given the faces of the buildings that these signs will be attached too. It is something the Design Commission is mindful of as these signs have moved through and run the risk of doing something too small on such a large face and that in itself would be visually uncomfortable, so the proportion of the signs are purposely kept smaller and in working with the architecture of the face of the building the signs themselves will be attached too. He further stated for the record that he is a resident and drives by it all the time.

Commissioner Hill commented that when this was first approved, the City Council held their hearing and there wasn't one empty chair in the house. One of the Councilmen asked for a show of hands at the beginning of that hearing and asked how many people wanted to see this built; it was almost unanimous. He further stated that if we're going to build it then we need to do it right. He has spent a lot of time on this and went through things a couple of times and even drove down to look at it. The totality of the circumstances with all things considered, the staff report nails it on the head. It's a good idea and he's prepared to support the project as requested.

Commissioner Davitt stated that when you look at a project like this, there is retail, office facility and signs are needed in terms of direction and where people need to go. The Home Goods (B Building) is reasonable and is a real compliment to the development and the City. The Sports Chalet signs are so far off the street and doesn't believe it's an issue, so he makes those findings as well. When you look at the other buildings, there is actually some reduction in

square footage the way he has calculated. He realizes that there is an increase in the number of signs being asked for, but in the reduction of overall signage that is supportable. The developer wants adequate signage that won't be a detriment to the center.

Commissioner Gelhaar stated that the Home Goods and Sport Chalet signs are far removed from the street and he can make the required Findings for them. He stated that the other signs that will be installed will be much closer to the street and he wants those signs to meet out code.

Mr. Cahill noted that the motion on the table bundled all the matters together as one motion, rather than as four distinct motion requests (one for each of Home Store, Sports Chalet, monument signs and the remainder of the project signage). He noted his approval to the Sports Chalet, Home Store and monument sign requests, but stated he would vote for the bundled motion with the understanding that the record would reflect his objection to the excess signage for the remainder of the project which was being granted signage area about 15% more than the normally permitted amounts.

M/S/C Davitt/Cahill to approve with added conditions of removing Condition 10, the Building A north wall sign shall not be illuminated, unless allowed through final review by the Design Commission, and removing Condition 11, the westernmost sign on the Building A south elevation shall be deleted. Unanimous.

**C. Parcel Map 063622; La Canada School District; request for time extension**

Chairman Cahill asked the Commission if they needed a staff report; they declined. He then asked if there was anyone present from La Canada School District present for discussion; no one was present.

M/S/C Gelhaar/Hill motion to approve a 24-month extension. Unanimous.

**D. Second-floor Review 08-07; Park; 5121 Oakwood Avenue**

Planner Gjolme reported on the applicant's request for a second-floor review to construct a new 2-story residence and attached garage comprising 5,177 sq. ft. The site is located on the west side of Oakwood Avenue, north of its intersection with Lynnhaven Lane, in the R-1-20,000 zone. The proposed residence is compliant with regard to all code standards, including floor area, setbacks, and height. The existing single-story residence would be demolished in conjunction with project approval.

The site is developed with a modest single-story home set back 33 feet from the front property line, though the appearance of a greater setback is apparent given the visual contribution of Oakwood's undeveloped parkway. The existing home's front setback is deficient, 6'-6" below the 39'-6" requirement

derived from the adjacent lots to the north and south. Single-story homes are adjacent to the north and south, with the home to the north and south. Single-story homes are adjacent to the north and south, with the home to the north favorably positioned 8 feet +/- above the subject pad. Views tend to be limited to the streetscape along Oakwood's north-south course, though some mid-range views to the upper Gould area to the east are possible.

Planner Gjolme displayed an array of photos, showing the existing types of homes approximate to the site. He noted that second-floor balconies/decks have been a sensitive issue with the Commission and neighbors, especially regarding privacy issues. There is a specific design-related conflict with the use of barrel roof tiles, typical of Spanish/Mediterranean styles with the otherwise traditional presentation. The building height would be 31-ft, which is exaggerated by Oakwood's narrow course and leads to a sense of visual closeness between properties.

Although immediate homes are primarily single story, several two-story homes are found in the neighborhood, including several of comparable size and scale. However, the proposed building program would result in a sizeable two-story house out of proportion and character for the area.

The design would not be consistent with the primary directives of the City's Residential Design Guidelines as related to Site Design, Physical Design Components, Neighborhood Compatibility and Landscaping, since issues of scale, compatibility and privacy need further attention and resolution.

Staff recommends that the request be continued in order to address design issues.

Chairman Cahill opened the public hearing.

Jin Lee, Architect, commented that they will continue to work with staff to follow the design guidelines for the City.

Al Van Deventure, resident, 5112 Oakwood Avenue, remarked that he appreciates all of the effort for trying to make a compliant project and for staff's tremendous work in highlighting their concerns. He further added that above Stoneglen, 19 lots have been under the CC&R's, which require one-story homes. He doesn't believe anybody is asking for a one-story home, but to give consideration for the mass front of the house, which does raise a lot of concern about the visual affect on such a narrow street and rural setting. By in large, the neighborhood has abided by the CC&R's even though parts of them may not be enforceable technically, we would like to see the spirit of the CC&R's considered and continued in that neighborhood.

Theresa Dvoracek, resident, 5127 Oakwood Avenue, stated that she wanted to thank everyone for working together on this project as it's personally upsetting to her. She submitted pictures to the Commissioners that her husband took of the existing property and further explained that they (her and her husband) have lived at their property for twenty-four years and they too wanted to remodel their home; they were lucky to get their home due to the developer backing out. Their concern is that they live in a lovely rural area and remodeled their home being aware of the CC&R's to want single story units; the consideration was to work within those codes when they remodeled 10 years ago. She explained that they are eight feet higher than the neighbor to the south and are on a hill, so if they added a two-story it would totally dwarf out their neighbor across the street. Their contactor suggested that they dig down deeper, so they got creative without having to adjust the roof line too much. She knows the neighbors want to build their dream home, but she's sure there are ways to do it by being creative with the project. She thanked them for listening to her words.

Min Park, property owner, 5121 Oakwood Avenue, commented that they will definitely work with the neighbors; they don't want to change the facade of the area as that's what attracted them to move there; they will continue to work together to try and fit everyone's needs.

Commissioner Davitt stated that the City encourages second-story houses, which is always nice when only one thing is being looked at such as a second-story review. It's a code compliant design, so it meets all of the requirements of a new second-story home, which is nice in terms of setbacks. He doesn't care for decks or balconies and thinks they can be easily eliminated, which would make a better project in terms of the proximity to the neighbors; he would really like to see that done. He disagrees with staff's recommendation of the height reduction and doesn't see that being much of an issue, but although it is a code compliant house, neighbors do have some legitimate concerns. There are a few things that can be done to create a better design. He supports staff for a continuance.

Commissioner Gelhaar commented that he pretty much agrees; the City allows second-floor houses and this property is large enough to handle a two-story house. He agrees with Commissioner Davitt, both balconies should be removed and replaced with roofs. He looks forward to seeing a re-design and feels that the privacy issue can be solved by removing the balconies and deck.

Commissioner Hill agreed with Commissioners Davitt and Gelhaar.

Chairman Cahill reported that he agreed with Commissioner Davitt and Gelhaar. He thinks the neighborhood and street should have a different kind of house, more like a cottage house since it's like a country lane and rural atmosphere. He thinks it's a very nice looking palatial home that doesn't seem

to fit the neighborhood from his perspective. Although it's not a requirement, he thinks it would go along way if it's the cottage look with more roof rather than a high profile wall.

M/S/C Gelhaar/Hill motioned for a continuance to date uncertain.  
Unanimous

**X. OTHER BUSINESS**

**A. Draft 2008-09 Capital Improvement Plan - conformance with General Plan:**

Senior Planner Buss, reported that each year the Planning Commission is required to review the Capital Improvement Plan to ensure that the proposals in the program are in conformance with the City's General Plan; intended to make sure new projects proposed in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is consistent with the goals and polices established in the General Plan. This review is intended to assure the Public Works' expenditure supports fulfillment of the City's long range development objectives. Many of the projects are continuing projects from previous years and you found them to be in conformance.

M/S/C Davitt/Gelhaar motion to approve Draft 2008-09 Capital Improvement Plan in substantial conformance with General Plan. Unanimous.

**XI. COMMENTS FROM COMMISSIONERS**

Commissioner Gelhaar commented about the story poles; the last project didn't represent the tower situations. He reiterated that they like the eves to be a different color than the roof line and hopes to see that in the future.

**XII. COMMENTS FROM THE DIRECTOR**

Comments were not offered.

**XIII. ADJOURNMENT**

M/S/C Davitt/Hill motioned to adjourn at 8:18 p.m. Unanimous

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Secretary to the Planning Commission