

CITY OF **LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE**
PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING NOTICE AND AGENDA 13-18

6:00 P.M.

Tuesday, October 22, 2013

**CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS
1327 Foothill Boulevard**

- I. CALL TO ORDER** The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m.
- II. ROLL:** Chairman Gunter, Vice Chairman Jain, Commissioners Der Sarkissian, McConnell and Walker. Director Stanley, Deputy City Attorney Guerra, Senior Planner Buss, Planners Gjolme and Clarke, Assistant Planners Harris and Parinas.
- III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Jain.
- IV. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:**

Greg Salman, of 1932 Hilldale Drive wanted to know if and when the sound walls will be built in 2013. He read about the proposed walls on the website a year ago and wanted to know if the project was still going to happen

Director Stanley replied that the City Council discussed the sound walls at their meeting the night before. They rejected the only bid that the City received because it didn't meet the criteria. The City will send it out for more bids which should take about four weeks. The design for the sound walls is done and construction will likely start next year. They will start on the east end of town and move west. He directed the speaker to speak to the Public Works Department regarding the duration of the project.

- V. REORDERING OF THE AGENDA:** 787 Greenridge Drive was continued to this meeting but was not placed on the agenda and will not be heard. The items on the agenda were rearranged in the following order: VIII A, VII A, VIII B, VIII C, VIII D, VII B.
- VI. CONSENT CALENDAR**
- VII. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS**

- A. Hillside Development Permit 13-16/Setback Modification 13-04 /Second-Floor Review 13-06/Negative Declaration; Avedian; 1936 Hilldale Drive:** Request to allow construction of a new approximately 3,200 sq. ft. house upon a hillside lot. Additionally, a Setback Modification is requested for a substandard front yard setback and for reduced second-floor side yard setbacks at the rear corners of the house. Second-floor review is also required since the new home would achieve a 2-story profile along the downslope to the rear. Staff is recommending approval of a Negative Declaration for this project. (Senior Planner Buss)

Senior Planner Buss gave a presentation in accordance with the staff report. He described the unique characteristics of the lot. He showed the new site plan. He summarized the issues that the Planning Commission had at the last meeting. He noted that the front property line curves along the street. The

project complies with the underlying allowable floor area but exceeds the Slope Factor Guideline by 875 sq. ft. First-floor setbacks are satisfied but the project would encroach into the second-floor setback requirement.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian asked staff for clarification if the "box" has not changed. He wanted to know if it got taller because the house was moved further up the slope and if that increased the height of the structure because the second retaining wall that was previously holding the patio is no longer there.

Senior Planner Buss replied that there is less depth but for the most part it did not change.

Commissioner Walker asked if the mature tree on the south side is on the subject or neighboring parcel.

Senior Planner Buss replied, yes for the most part. There may be an existing shrub on the subject property. His main concern was with the proposed landscaping in relation to the proposed leach fields

Chair Gunter asked if the story poles were still up.

Senior Planner Buss replied that we gave them an exemption. This house was approved several times and the Director exempted them since the design was very similar in design to the last project.

Edward Hagobian, the project architect, showed the Commission the color board and a color elevation. He explained that he widened the house and made it less deep as compared to the previous design. This does not include the balcony. They upgraded the quality of the architectural materials. The landscaping was increased because the flat terrace in the rear was eliminated. He designed the balconies with the exposed rafters to add architectural interest to the façade. If the balconies are removed the floor area would be reduced but they hope they won't have to remove the balconies. The widening of the house did reduce the side setbacks but now the floor plan functions better. They worked with the engineering department to design the driveway and the garage is also now more accessible.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian asked if the block wall could be finished to match the house.

Mr. Hagobian indicated that he avoids stuccoing walls because of moisture issues but offered to use decorative block.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian asked if he could come closer to the color of the house.

Mr. Hagobian explained that there is lighter block available or they could paint regular block.

Commissioner McConnell stated that the landscape plan shows shrubs in front of walls. He asked if they intended to screen the walls.

Mr. Hagobian was unsure of what was shown on the landscape plan since he didn't prepare it.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian indicated that the landscape plan called out blue hibiscus in front of the walls.

Greg Salman, of 1932 Hilldale Drive, is the southerly neighbor. He asked for clarification where the property line was in relation to the retaining wall and the terrace on that side.

Senior Planner Buss explained that the back of the retaining wall is on the property line

Mr. Salman wanted to make sure that the wall will support his property.

Director Stanley indicated that he will likely have to add freeboard to the top of the wall so that dirt won't fall onto the other side of the wall. He suggested adding a condition to screen the wall for review and approval

by the Director of Community Development. He added that they might have to revise the plant species to one that requires less water as required by the new water efficiency ordinance.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian indicated that he visited the site at least 3 times and he was happy the property owner listened to the Planning Commission's advice. He was familiar with the work of the new project architect and the landscape architect. He can make all the findings. The excess height is minor. Adding a retaining wall to lower the height of the structure is a worse idea. The upslope view of his project will be better than the property owner's downslope view to the shopping center below. Mass of house is far less since it is buried into the hill and it appears to be one story from the street. The design of the project has improved tremendously.

Commissioner Walker thanked the applicant for addressing all the Commission's concerns. She felt that the view was broader than just looking down at the shopping center. She liked that the retaining wall was removed. She could make all the findings.

Commissioner McConnell indicated that he can make all the findings but would like to add a condition of approval for the landscaping to screen the various sections of the retaining wall.

Commissioner Jain also visited the site many times and asked the applicant if he is sure he can finish the house this time. He liked that the rear retaining wall was removed. He was OK with the size of the since 600 sq. ft. is buried into the hillside. It is not a huge house. The color of retaining wall and the landscape screening is critical. He could make all the findings.

Chair Gunter appreciated the extra effort put into the drawings this time around. All the plans are consistent with each other. He was OK with the Setback Modification for the front and could make the findings for the Hillside Development Permit but he struggled with the findings for the Setback Modification for the side-yard encroachments. He suggested making the house smaller and he expressed concern that the floor area was so far above the Slope Factor Guideline. He highlighted Condition #17 regarding construction equipment and parking. He expressed concern that this condition be strictly adhered to since the street is barely navigable as it is. He asked for clarification if the added condition for the retaining wall on the south side should require split-face block and/or have landscape screening.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian stated that it should be both split-faced to reduce glare and screened by landscaping. The block should not be gray and should be compatible with the color of the house as much as possible.

M/S/C Der Sarkissian/McConnell to approve the project as presented with the added Condition #19 requiring each portion of the retaining wall to be split-faced block in an earth color with landscaping in front of each retaining wall. 4-1 Gunter no.

- B. Zone Change 13-01 (Sign Ordinance Amendment)/Negative Declaration; City-wide:** Request to consider adoption of an amendment to the City's Zoning Ordinance pertaining to Section 11.37.040; Sign Regulations Standards and Guidelines. More specifically, the amendment would allow electronic reader-boards in excess of 4 sq. ft. on certain properties zoned Public/Semi-public and Institutional with private school uses. This is an amendment to the City's Zoning Ordinance, which requires a future City Council public hearing and City Council approval (to be noticed later). The Planning Commission will make a recommendation to the City Council at this hearing. Staff is recommending that the Planning Commission recommend approval of a Negative Declaration. (Planner Gjolme)

Director Stanley presents explaining the history of proposal – the item was seen by the Planning Commission and City Council in the past as study sessions. He explains that the Design Commission

recommended no change to the code but had alternatives if it was to be changed. He explains the proposed limits in the draft ordinance amendment.

Director Stanley hands out two sheets with information relating to other cities, what they do, and a list of all the schools in the city and whether they would qualify. Of the 12 schools, 8 would qualify. A resolution is available for either decision of the Planning Commission.

Chair Gunter notes that he is in favor of reader boards and always has been on every prior vote.

Commissioner Jain notes that he is on the [readerboard] ad hoc committee. The committee was generally supportive of reader boards (except Design Commissioner Tobias), but the sign should not be aimed at residential areas. He would want the sign to change contents at night only. He believes the size is too big, and that maybe single-sided and five square feet should be the limit.

Director Stanley shows examples of signs from bad to good. He states to keep in mind that the proposed standard would allow both sides of the sign. The current ordinance only allows 4 sf.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian asks about the limits of the rest of the monument sign.

Director Stanley explains the limits as proposed in the draft ordinance. The sign would be contained within the 4 ft. by 6 ft. limits.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian is concerned about intensity and issues with the way that the calculation is derived.

Commissioner McConnell asks if the Traffic Engineer was asked about the ordinance. He states that the transportation issues are most important. He comments that the La Canada High School sign is exempt.

Commissioner Walker asks if Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy (FSHA) qualifies [staff responds – yes].

The Public Hearing is opened. There are no speakers. The Public Hearing is closed.

Chair Gunter is concerned that the rules are written to prevent the signs. The 15' limitation from the property line is not workable. Having the sign oriented away from adjacent residential is not possible. Stating that all signs must be Craftsman style is not workable and does not belong here. Having a black field and white letter color is not in within current technology. He would rather use "nits" than "foot-candles."

Commissioner McConnell asks if staff talked to Department of Transportation personnel. He states there is a book that identifies the standard for light emission.

Chair Gunter states that allowing a sign that will not be readable is not a good thing; message changing once in 24 hours is not rational. California law allows content change once every 8 seconds.

Commissioner McConnell states that the sign must be sized so that it can be read quickly and at speed. He points to the Burbank school; it is a linear sign that reads fine and is not distracting.

Commissioner Walker states that the school list concentrates traffic. There are enough hazards on the road and this would just exacerbate hazards. FSHA is in the residential area and that will be problematic.

Commissioner McConnell asks if this would add signage to the site.

Director Stanley answers yes; this adds another sign to a site.

Chair Gunter states that this should not increase the amount of signage on the site. He would just allow the reader in an existing monument sign with locations criteria.

The Commission discusses general concerns with the zones and brightness of sign noting that black with white is not good, and light letters on dark background is better than the reverse. They would apply the same lessons as the regular sign standards for monuments; just use those standards that are already in the ordinance. Any sign must add illumination, and brightness needs to be better defined using an industry expert. The ordinance needs to include the traffic engineer's review for sight distance and visibility. Any sign has to vary brightness for day versus night. If driving the speed limit, a driver should be able to read the sign.

Chair Gunter would like staff to take the grid from the report and compare it to monument signs and make the ordinance similar. Zoning and location should not be an issue. Staff could have an asterisk in the monument sign section that references the allowance for an additional digital display within the sign. Changing the copy more rapidly is necessary; on the order of once every ten minutes maximum.

Director Stanley repeats: Incorporate readerboards into monument signs; no animation; brightness addressed; ten minute copy changes; and no background color regulation.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian would like to have the Planning Commission look at any examples that staff finds. [9:50 p.m.]

The matter is continued to November 26th on a motion by Chair Gunter and seconded by Commissioner Der Sarkissian. The motion carries on a 5-0 vote.

VIII. PUBLIC HEARINGS:

- A. **Variance 13-06/Categorical Exemption; Hartunian; 2121 Patagonia Drive:** Request to allow the existing 18'-1" wide non-conforming garage to be retained. The required garage width is 20'-0". Staff is recommending approval of a Categorical Exemption for this project. (Assistant Planner Harris)

Assistant Planner Harris presents. The public hearing is opened. There are no speakers and the public hearing is closed.

Chair Gunter states he visited the site and agrees with the Staff Report. Commissioners Jain and McConnell also agree. Commissioner Der Sarkissian says that the garage is better and supports the project as proposed. Commissioner Walker agrees with the other members.

Chair Gunter moves, Commissioner Walker seconds a motion to approve the project as presented. The motion carries on a 5-0 vote.

- B. **Second Floor Review 13-16/Categorical Exemption; McGowen/Hung; 4733 Hampton Road:** Request to allow construction of a new 2,916 sq. ft. two-story residence with a 936 sq. ft. basement on a 8,100 sq. ft. lot. The project complies with all floor area, setback, size and height requirements. Staff is recommending approval of a Categorical Exemption for this project. (Planner Clarke)

Planner Clarke presents the project: a single family house. He shows pictures of the adjacent and other surrounding houses. He addresses window placement and privacy and landscaping. He notes that privacy is maintained. The neighbor had asked for a couple of concessions and the applicant complied. The

project proposes no modifications or other concessions, although the Commission could consider changing the façade and lowering the height of house.

Commissioner McConnell asks questions about the front façade materials.

Planner Clarke suggests a change to be compatible with neighborhood.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian asks if the cross-hatch area is landscaping. He also asks about the numbers in the report and how the plans don't correspond; the calculation is 2,690 sf and the plan is presented as 2,916 sf. [Planner Clarke responds that the difference is the volume space.] He asks about the basement; will it be there or not?

Chair Gunter notes that it is awkward for the Commission not to reproduce the numbers correctly.

Planner Clarke responds that the basement could be approved and not built or vice-versa. The decision will be made at building permit time. The approval is for the above ground structure.

Commissioner Jain asks what GFA is and asks if the 150 sf is the exemption for volume space [yes].

Ryan McGowen, project architect, the 150 sf is the exemption for volume, He is using 91 sf out of that. The discrepancy may be the floor area. The architecture is Spanish style.

Chair Gunter states it is not necessary to talk about the basement since that is not before the Commission.

Commissioner Jain asks if the grading may be an issue since the dirt has to be removed.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian states that the basement is a major issue for him. He also addresses the wood on the exterior of the building in Fire Zone 4.

Benjamin Hung, owner, states that the overall design is to try to blend in with neighborhood. The basement would allow for growing into the house and it could be a play area for the kids. He wants to have an approval with the basement, thus having the option for a later decision. The landscape would be left alone with the smaller footprint of future house. No changes proposed for now. The window placement was sensitive to neighbor. We want to maximize the space for future.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian states that the driveway is in a new location and asks if that will require tree removal.

The applicant affirms it will.

There are no other speakers. Chair Gunter closes the Public Hearing at 7:20 p.m.

Commissioner McConnell states that he visited the site and can support the proposal. There are other stone houses so that siding is not an issue. He won't discuss the basement because it is not before them.

Commissioner Jain states he also visited the site. He notes that it is smaller in scale than the adjacent house and has good modulation. He can support the request as submitted.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian states that the basement is on the drawings and does not know how the Commission cannot address the basement. He has no problem with all the other parts of the design. He has great problems with a house that is within 2 feet of the maximum volume (above ground) and lots of airways. He cannot support the airways (60% of the perimeter).

Commissioner Walker states that she visited the site. She is okay with project bulk as it is within the code.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian has a problem with light wells around 60% of the perimeter of the building to allow for basement windows. He believes that is too much.

Commissioner Walker states that she is not going to talk about the basement because it is not within their purview tonight. Her only comment is that she wants condition #14 to stipulate additional tree screening along the south side of the property. Where it talks about the landscape plan next to deck – she would remove the language. She wants screening all along the southern side. The architecture is fine. Summarizing, she would like the correction to condition #14. She states that she appreciates how the north and south sides were designed. She can make all the Findings for approval.

Chair Gunter notes that he visited the site. The neighborhood is eclectic in a good way. It meets what the City is trying to do with the Design Guidelines. He has no problem with applicant's materials. The height is okay since it meets the standards. It is not that the basement doesn't matter, it is because it is not part of the approval. He can support the request and would also support the modification to condition #14. He asked if there are any other questions. Noting none, he calls for a motion.

Commissioner McConnell moves for approval of the project with the change to condition #14, Commissioner Walker seconds. The motion carries on a 4-1 vote with Commissioner Der Sarkissian voting no. Chair Gunter notes the fifteen day appeal period.

- C. **Second Floor Review 13-12/Setback Modification 13-20/Categorical Exemption; Stein/Rabb; 4739 La Cañada Boulevard:** Request to allow 466 sq. ft. in first floor additions, 295 sq. ft. in second floor volume space, a new 737 sq. ft. garage and studio with a basement and the demolition of the existing garage and storage area. The project would permit a new 13'-2" encroachment into the front yard setback and maintain an encroachment into the north side yard setback. Staff is recommending approval of a Categorical Exemption for this project. (Planner Clarke)

Planner Clarke states that more than 30% of the house is being removed so this is like a new house. The applicant wants to retain the existing setbacks. The house is aiming for Platinum LEED level. He shows photos of the surrounding houses. He explains features of the house. The 2 story element is volume space and clerestory for better air circulation. It is a Craftsman style house. He illustrates the encroachments for the side and front. The front setback becomes 14' versus the required 28'. Staff is in favor of the second story and the setbacks are used to create an interesting architecture for the house.

Director Stanley notes that the second story is part of the air circulation process as part of the LEED design.

Chair Gunter states the Right-of-Way of the street is all over the place. The word "easement" should not be in the report, it is the Right-of-Way. This is because of the sidewalk that was built earlier. This needs to be clear in the record because it was difficult to know what property the sidewalks were built on.

Much discussion ensues regarding the jogging nature of the right-of-way and how it is shown on the plans.

Commissioner McConnell has questions relating to the detached garage/studio and its setback requirements. The Commission and the Director discuss the qualifications for the buildings. There is discussion as to whether the studio which is attached to the garage causes the whole building to be

required to meet the regular setback. The Director makes the interpretation as to whether it qualifies for the five foot setback exemption.

Chair Gunter opens the Public Hearing at 7:55 p.m.

John Latrelle, applicant's architect, states that his client has a 16 year old disabled child and this is being done for him. Setback guidelines are for light and ventilation. The goal of the client is to take the house off the grid and make it sustainable. The original garage was inaccessible. They want to minimize the concrete and maximize the pervious surface. The pool will be filled in. Geothermal coils will be put in the hole from the pool for boosting heat. The house is a passive design with photovoltaic panels. The new roof uses natural ventilation. The clerestory has electrically operated windows that allow heat to escape. The clerestory can also be used to circulate heat in winter. There are lots of credits involved in the design and the recycling of materials for Platinum LEED design. The look of the front yard is twenty feet for all intents due to the parkway.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian asks what a Hollywood style driveway is.

Mr. Latrelle responds that it is landscaping down the middle. He continues his description that the house captures the rainwater and uses it for irrigation.

Commissioner Jain states the sheets are not clear for area.

Mr. Latrelle states there were two sets of drawings and the second set did show the calculations. There are also Ham Radio antennas.

There were no other speakers. The Chair closes the public hearing at 8:05 p.m.

Commissioner Walker congratulates the applicant on his efforts. She likes the design. She is looking at the street setback plan and having a problem with the extension of easement into the front yard. She would like the current line maintained. Another 4'-7" is problematic. She states she must be talked into the porch.

Commissioner McConnell is having problems with both edges of the yard coming to the front. He agrees with Commissioner Walker.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian visited the site and talked to the applicant. He has no problem with the basement here. The additions are minor; the porch is just four columns. He thought other houses were already in front, looking at the aerial photo. He can make the findings as presented.

Commissioner Jain visited the site and commented about the nice design. He liked the vintage drawings. He liked the concept and noted that it is not new, but being brought back. He states that this is not a second story and should not be counted as such. He has some concerns with the porch. He asks if it is essential to the design. He states that if he buys into the design, then he is buying into the porch.

Chair Gunter visited the site every day. He notes that it is exciting to see a LEED design. He supports the side encroachment. He is in favor of the porch to support livable front yards, not a sterile front. He states that this is a modest encroachment on an existing street. He supports porches in general. Carving an exception would eliminate them from being seen by the Planning Commission and that would be bad. He would leave the ordinance alone.

Commissioner McConnell asks if this change affects the setback of others.

Director Stanley replies "no" because 25' is the minimum.

Chair Gunter asks if the commission can be convinced that the front setback is okay.

Commissioner Walker asks if there is a hardship that makes the encroachment necessary. She cannot find on the property that there is a hardship created by not granting the additional 4'-7". She is okay with the 19'-5" but can't support the findings for the additional front encroachment.

Chair Gunter states that the Commission can separate votes on the two matters for encroachment or just take one votes and have Commissioner Walker note her issues on part of the vote. The Commission agrees with two votes.

Chair Gunter moves to approve SFR 13-20/Mod 13-12 as submitted. Commissioner Jain seconds the motion. The SFR portion of the motion carries on a 5-0 vote. The Modification portion of the motion carries on a 3-2 vote with Commissioners Walker and McConnell voting no. The project is approved.

- D. **Second Floor Review 13-21/Categorical Exemption; Grace Partnership/Kim; 4407 Shepherds Lane:** Request to allow a 1,552-square foot second floor addition and a 278-square foot first floor (net) addition to an existing single-story house. The residence would be considered a new structure because the project involves demolition of more than 30% of the roof structure of the existing house. Staff is recommending approval of a Categorical Exemption for this project. (Assistant Planner Parinas)

Assistant Planner Parinas presents the project and explains the request. She notes the adjacent 2-story houses and these are taller than the proposed house.

Commissioner Walker asks if the driveway will have to change if they remove it.

Assistant Planner Parinas states the change to the garage will not trigger changes to the driveway.

Commissioner McConnell asks if there are any changes to the second story windows to protect privacy.

Assistant Planner Parinas states the existing screening provides adequate privacy.

Chair Gunter opens the public hearing.

Leo Cho, the applicant's representative, states that the staff report was complete and thanks staff for guidance. The optimum design was arrived at for the neighborhood and budget was saved.

With no other speakers, Chair Gunter closes the public hearing (8:30 p.m.)

Commissioner Jain (visited the site) states that this is a small project in his view and he can support it.

Commissioner McConnell states that he visited the site. These are large lots and can be accommodated. He is not particularly supportive of the design, but can support the project.

Commissioner Walker states the screening on south side is not much and windows should be addressed. She feels it needs added screening. She has concerns about the two windows.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian visited the site and has no problem. He states that pulling the house away from the south side is good. Since the neighbor has been looking at the house from his second story windows, so don't penalize this owner. He supports as presented.

Chair Gunter visited the site. There are no exceptions requested. More detail would have been better because the house is somewhat plain. He also agrees with Commissioner Der Sarkissian that having no windows would not be good. The windows should stay and he is not concerned about screening. He supports the project as submitted.

Commissioner Walker asks if the Commission could work in an addition stipulation that would add screening on south side.

Staff noted that they were not concerned with the windows.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian was fine with the proposal for additional screening, but added that planting will take a long time before it gets high.

Commissioner Jain states that planting would benefit the applicant.

Commissioner Der Sarkissian states that the plans suggest planting on the south side. He would put (condition) review wording for the Director.

Chair Gunter would rather not include conditions if they are not needed because it would just be something else that staff would need to be tracking three years from now.

Commissioner Jain moves and Commissioner Der Sarkissian seconds a motion to approve the project with the applicant looking at landscaping for the south side. The motion carries on a 5-0 vote.

IX. OTHER BUSINESS: None

X. REPORT OF DIRECTOR'S REVIEWS

- A. **DM 13-33 (SB); Hong; 4653 Alveo Road:** Approved new pool equipment enclosure to encroach 2'-0" into the west side-yard setback and 10'-0" into the rear setback.
- B. **HDP 13-46; Takao; 5214 Crown Avenue:** Approved 409 sf addition to single-story residence. Complies with all setbacks and floor area limitations.

XI. COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Der Sarkissian shares some ideas on basements for the future. He provides a handout to bring back to a future meeting and study session. Chair Gunter wants clear direction from City Council before we bring it back to the Planning Commission.

Commissioner McConnell comments about new staff reports incorporating old information and updates to the project. He states that the report needs to be updated with the new information, not just references to prior reports.

The Commission discussed the appeal that came in.

Chair Gunter states that he would have the applicant do the work for data (numbers) and we define what data we want and that the drawings are labeled correctly. The square footage and setbacks should be labeled correctly.

XII. COMMENTS FROM THE DIRECTOR

Director Stanley states that staff is pushing fast on the Housing Element and looking to move the Zone Change to the Planning Commission in November. We could do a study session in the week before (19th).

XIII. ADJOURNMENT: 10:07 p.m.