



DATE: February 15, 2023

AGENDA ITEM # 6

TO: Design Review Commission
FROM: Sean Gallegos, Senior Planner
SUBJECT: SC22-0031 – 1248 Via Huerta

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve design review application SC22-0031 subject to the listed findings and conditions

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This is a design review application for new house. The project includes 3,502 square feet at the first story and 624 square feet at the second story. The following table summarizes the project's technical details:

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION: Single-family, Residential
ZONING: R1-10
PARCEL SIZE: 14,074 square feet
MATERIALS: composition shingle, stucco and cedar siding, fiberglass windows and wood trim and doors,

	Existing	Proposed	Allowed/Required
LOT COVERAGE:	2,369 square feet	3,127 square feet	4,925.9 square feet
FLOOR AREA:			
Main floor (2 nd floor)	2,369 square feet	3,502 square feet	
Lower floor (1 st floor)	-	624 square feet	
Total	2,369 square feet	4,126 square feet	4,157 square feet
SETBACKS:			
Front	26.5 feet	33.75 feet	25 feet
Rear	77.2 feet	42.25 feet	25 feet
Right side (1 st /2 nd)	10 feet/-	10 feet/25.2 feet	10 feet/17.5 feet
Left side(1 st /2 nd)	11.5 feet/-	17.35 feet/38 feet	10 feet/17.5 feet
HEIGHT:	23 feet	26.3	27 feet

BACKGROUND

Neighborhood Context

The subject property is located in a Diverse Character Neighborhood, as defined in the City's Residential Design Guidelines. The subject property is located on Via Huerta between Sierra Ventura Drive and Via Maderos, and the site slopes upward from the street frontage. Along Via Huerta, there are primarily two-story Ranch style houses that are similar in size, footprint, design characteristics, building scale, and rustic materials. The exterior materials commonly used include stucco, horizontal siding and board and batten siding and wood trim accents. Roof forms are mostly low-sloped pitched gable, hipped and Dutch-gable roofs with composition shingles. The residences have low scale horizontal eave lines with wall plates that appear to be between eight to nine feet in height and garages that face the street or face a side yard. The neighborhood character appears consistent through rustic materials, similar house scale, and roof forms. The street does not have a consistent street tree pattern but does have a variety of mature trees and vegetation.

DISCUSSION

According to the Design Guidelines, in Diverse Character Neighborhoods, good neighbor design has its own design integrity while incorporating some design elements, materials and scale found in the neighborhood.

As depicted in the design plans (Attachment G), the applicant proposes a new two-story residence with an attached garage. The proposed setbacks meet or exceed the required setbacks for the R1-10 zoning district. Please refer to the table above for more specific setbacks proposed and as required pursuant to the R1-10 Zoning District Standards found in Los Altos Municipal Code (LAMC) Chapter 14.06.



The proposed two-story house has a traditional style that uses design elements and materials that are compatible with the immediate neighborhood. The project uses design elements such as a gable and hipped roof forms, articulated massing, steep-pitched (6:12) roof, and high-quality materials that are compatible with the neighborhood. The project does a good job of integrating the hipped and gable roof forms and recessed entry porch, which are elements from the neighborhood, while still establishing its own design integrity. The project is utilizing high quality materials, such as composition shingle, stucco siding, stone veneer, wood trim, aluminum clad wood windows and doors, which are integral to the architectural design of the house. The project's material board is included as Attachment E. Overall, the project is compatible with this diverse character neighborhood setting and has an appropriate relationship to the adjacent structures.

Due to the slope of the site, the house will appear as a one-story structure with a tall finished floor height when viewed from the street and a portion of the structure is recessed into the grade along the sides and rear, which reduces the perception of excessive bulk. Due to the slope of the lot, there are multiple first and second story levels for the home. Along the front and right side of the house, a garage is proposed at a first floor level, and a master bedroom and master bathroom are proposed at the second floor level. At the first floor level to the left of the garage and behind the stairs, the applicant proposes a foyer, living room, office, kitchen, nook, three bedrooms, three full bathrooms, one powder room, and a second floor level is proposed with a family-multi-function room.

According to the Residential Design Guidelines, a house should be designed to fit the lot and should not result in a home that stands out in the neighborhood. On hillside lots, the Residential Design Guidelines recommends the following:

- Dwellings on hillside lots should reflect the topography in their designs by following the natural contours of the site, with minimal grading.
- Use split-level and multi-level plans.
- Avoid tall walls under the first floor by stepping the floor level with the grade.
- Screen any open space under the living space above with either lattice or solid wall infill.
- To soften these areas, plant landscaping in front of them.
- Avoid tall unbroken expanses of wall.

Due to the upslope nature of the lot, the project minimizes the bulk and scale of the second story along the street frontage by maintaining a one- and two-story story appearance consistent with adjacent properties.

Along the front and right side of the house, the first story garage is proposed with a nine-foot plate height, and the second story master bedroom, master bathroom, walk-in closet, laundry and stairs are proposed with a nine-foot plate height. At the first-floor level to the left of the garage and behind the stairs, first floor foyer, living room, office, kitchen, nook, three bedrooms, three full bathrooms, and one powder room have a nine-foot plate height, and a second floor level is proposed with a family-multi-function room that has an eight-foot, two-inch plate height.

The Residential Design Guidelines recommends avoiding tall walls under the first story by stepping the floor level with the grade. As noted in the civil drawings (Sheet CC1), the proposed primary first floor has a topographic elevation of 323 feet and the existing house has a topographic elevation of 322.51, which is a difference of .51 feet. While the house does have a tall wall beneath the first floor along the front elevation and small segments of the left and right side elevations, the potential bulk impacts are similar to the perceived bulk impacts of the existing house due maintaining similar finished floor heights.

The project minimizes the bulk of the rear segment of the left and side elevations and rear elevation by cutting into the hillside, which results in a perceived one-story house along the rear segments of the sides and the rear elevations.

The proposed project is sensitive to the scale of the neighborhood and incorporates similar massing found within the neighborhood context in the kitchen and dining area on the main floor, and the lower level, with nine-foot respective plate heights. While the house has a steeper roof form with the 6:12 roof pitch, the roof form successfully obscures the second story family room, which minimizes the potential bulk of the second story.

While this design has a larger overall bulk, mass and scale, staff does believe that due to the hillside context and limited visibility off of the site along the sides and rear, the design appears to reasonably address the City’s design review findings related to bulk, mass and neighborhood context.

The design findings also require that a project not unreasonably interfere with views. Unless there is a view shed or easement across a property, there are no “rights” to a particular view. The intent of the City’s view finding is clarified in Section 4.1 of the Design Guidelines and relates to minimizing the visual impact of a project. On hillside lots, dwellings should reflect the topography by following the contours of the site.

The 26.25-foot-tall house is in scale with other houses within the surrounding neighborhood. The overall height is also minimized by cutting into the natural grade along rear the lot and lowering the grade approximately 3.25 feet. The house is adequately screened with trees and various landscaping and several mature trees that line the right side and the rear of the property. Overall, staff believes the height of the new house, low-scale roof form and the landscape screening diminishes view impacts to properties from the upslope.

Privacy

There are no second story windows proposed along the side and rear elevations; therefore, there are no potential privacy impacts.

Landscaping

The application includes an arborist report (Attachment F) that provides an inventory of the 21 on-site trees and three trees on adjacent properties. The applicant proposes the removal of no protected trees. A comprehensive landscaping plan has been provided. The landscaping plan includes maintaining the existing protected trees. The project meets the City’s landscaping regulations and street tree guidelines with the new landscaping and hardscape. Since the new landscaping area exceeds 500 square feet, the project requires a landscape plan that complies with the City’s Water Efficient Landscape Regulations.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This project is categorically exempt from environmental review under Section 15303 of the California Environmental Quality Act because it involves the construction of a single-family dwelling in a residential zone.

Public Notification and Community Outreach

A public meeting notice was posted on the property and mailed to 12 nearby property owners on Via Huerta and Chuleta Court. The Notification Map is included in Attachment C.

Based on neighborhood outreach efforts, the applicants have provided documentation showing outreach to the neighbors in the immediate neighborhood context. A document from the applicant regarding outreach is included in Attachment D.

Public Correspondence

No correspondence was received from neighboring property owners.

Cc: Jun Zhang, Applicant and Designer
Patricia Sierra, Property Owners

Attachments:

- A. Neighborhood Combability Worksheet
- B. Public Notification Map
- C. Public Notice Poster
- D. Proof of Community Outreach
- E. Materials Board
- F. Arborist Report
- G. Design Plans

FINDINGS

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With regard to the new one-story house, the Design Review Commission finds the following in accordance with Section 14.76.050 of the Municipal Code:

1. The proposed new house complies with all provision of this chapter;
2. The height, elevations, and placement on the site of the proposed new house, when considered with reference to the nature and location of residential structures on adjacent lots, will avoid unreasonable interference with views and privacy and will consider the topographic and geologic constraints imposed by particular building site conditions;
3. The natural landscape will be preserved insofar as practicable by minimizing tree and soil removal; grade changes shall be minimized and will be in keeping with the general appearance of neighboring developed areas;
4. The orientation of the proposed new house in relation to the immediate neighborhood will minimize the perception of excessive bulk and mass;
5. General architectural considerations, including the character, size, scale, and quality of the design, the architectural relationship with the site and other buildings, building materials, and similar elements have been incorporated in order to insure the compatibility of the development with its design concept and the character of adjacent buildings; and
6. The proposed new house has been designed to follow the natural contours of the site with minimal grading, minimum impervious cover, and maximum erosion protection.

CONDITIONS

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GENERAL

1. Expiration

The Design Review Approval will expire on February 15, 2025 unless prior to the date of expiration, a building permit is issued, or an extension is granted pursuant to Section 14.76.090 of the Zoning Code.

2. Approved Plans

The approval is based on the plans and materials received on February 1, 2023, except as may be modified by these conditions.

3. Protected Trees

The existing trees shall be protected under this application and cannot be removed without a tree removal permit from the Development Services Director.

4. Encroachment Permit

An encroachment permit shall be obtained from the Engineering Division prior to doing any work within the public right-of-way including the street shoulder. All work within the public street right-of-way shall be in compliance with the City's Shoulder Paving Policy.

5. New Fireplaces

Only gas fireplaces, pellet fueled wood heaters or EPA certified wood-burning appliances may be installed in all new construction pursuant to Chapter 12.64 of the Municipal Code.

6. Landscaping

The project shall be subject to the City's Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (WELo) pursuant to Chapter 12.36 of the Municipal Code if over 500 square feet or more of new landscape area, including irrigated planting areas, turf areas, and water features is proposed.

7. Underground Utility and Fire Sprinkler Requirements

Additions exceeding fifty (50) percent of the existing living area (existing square footage calculations shall not include existing basements) and/or additions of 750 square feet or more shall trigger the undergrounding of utilities and new fire sprinklers. Additional square footage calculations shall include existing removed exterior footings and foundations being replaced and rebuilt. Any new utility service drops are pursuant to Chapter 12.68 of the Municipal Code.

8. Indemnity and Hold Harmless

The applicant/owner agrees to indemnify, defend, protect, and hold the City harmless from all costs and expenses, including attorney's fees, incurred by the City or held to be the liability of the City in connection with the City's defense of its actions in any proceedings brought in any State or Federal Court, challenging any of the City's action with respect to the applicant's project. The City may withhold final maps and/or

permits, including temporary or final occupancy permits, for failure to pay all costs and expenses, including attorney's fees, incurred by the City in connection with the City's defense of its actions.

INCLUDED WITH THE BUILDING PERMIT SUBMITTAL

9. Conditions of Approval

Incorporate the conditions of approval into the title page of the plans.

10. Tree Protection Note

On the grading plan and/or the site plan, show all tree protection fencing and add the following note: "All tree protection fencing shall be chain link and a minimum of five feet in height with posts driven into the ground."

11. Water Efficient Landscape Plan

Provide a landscape documentation package prepared by a licensed landscape professional showing how the project complies with the City's Water Efficient Landscape Regulations and include signed statements from the project's landscape professional and property owner.

12. Reach Codes

Building Permit Applications submitted on or after January 1, 2023 shall comply with specific amendments to the 2022 California Green Building Standards for Electric Vehicle Infrastructure and the 2022 California Energy Code as provided in Ordinances No 2022-487 which amended Chapter 12.22 Energy Code and Chapter 12.26 California Green Building Standards Code of the Los Altos Municipal Code. The building design plans shall comply with the standards and the applicant shall submit supplemental application materials as required by the Building Division to demonstrate compliance.

13. California Water Service Upgrades

You are responsible for contacting and coordinating with the California Water Service Company any water service improvements including but not limited to relocation of water meters, increasing water meter sizing or the installation of fire hydrants. The City recommends consulting with California Water Service Company as early as possible to avoid construction or inspection delays.

14. Green Building Standards

Provide verification that the house will comply with the California Green Building Standards pursuant to Chapter 12.26 of the Municipal Code and provide a signature from the project's Qualified Green Building Professional Designer/Architect and property owner.

15. Underground Utility Location

Show the location of underground utilities pursuant to Chapter 12.68 of the Municipal Code. Underground utility trenches shall avoid the drip-lines of all protected trees unless approved by the project arborist and the Planning Division.

16. Outdoor Condensing Unit Sound Rating

Show the location of any air conditioning unit(s) on the site plan including the model number of the unit(s), the nominal size of the unit, and setback to the nearest property line. Provide the manufacturer's specifications showing the sound rating for each unit.

The air conditioning units must be located to comply with the City's Noise Control Ordinance (Chapter 6.16) and in compliance with the Planning Division setback provisions. The units shall be screened from view of the street.

17. Off-haul Excavated Soil

The grading plan shall show specific grading cut and/or fill quantities. Cross section details showing the existing and proposed grading through at least two perpendicular portions of the site or more shall be provided to fully characterize the site. A note on the grading plans should state that all excess dirt shall be off-hauled from the site and shall not be used as fill material unless approved by the Building and Planning Divisions.

18. Storm Water Management

Show how the project is in compliance with the New Development and Construction Best Management Practices and Urban Runoff Pollution Prevention program, as adopted by the City for the purposes of preventing storm water pollution (i.e. downspouts directed to landscaped areas, minimize directly connected impervious

PRIOR TO ISSUANCE OF BUILDING OR DEMOLITION PERMIT

19. Tree Protection

Tree protection fencing shall be installed around the dripline(s), or as required by the project arborist, of the existing trees as shown on the site plan. Tree protection fencing shall be chain link and a minimum of five feet in height with posts driven into the ground and shall not be removed until all building construction has been completed unless approved by the Planning Division.

20. School Fee Payment

In accordance with Section 65995 of the California Government Code, and as authorized under Section 17620 of the Education Code, the property owner shall pay the established school fee for each school district the property is located in and provide receipts to the Building Division. The City of Los Altos shall provide the property owner the resulting increase in assessable space on a form approved by the school district. Payments shall be made directly to the school districts.

PRIOR TO FINAL INSPECTION

21. Landscaping Installation and Verification

Provide a landscape Certificate of Completion, signed by the project's landscape professional and property owner, verifying that the trees, landscaping and irrigation were installed per the approved landscape documentation package.

22. Landscape Privacy Screening

The landscape intended to provide privacy screening shall be inspected by the Planning Division and shall be supplemented by additional screening material as required to adequately mitigate potential privacy impacts to surrounding properties.

23. Green Building Verification

Submit verification that the house was built in compliance with the City's Green Building Ordinance (Chapter 12.26 of the Municipal Code).