



DATE: July 19, 2023

AGENDA ITEM #2

TO: Nick Zornes, Zoning Administrator
FROM: Sean Gallegos, Senior Planner
SUBJECT: SC22-0020 – 631 Torwood Lane

RECOMMENDATION

Approve design review application SC22-0020 for the construction of first and second-story additions to an existing one-story house subject to the listed findings and conditions of approval and find the project categorically exempt under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15301 (“Existing Facilities”).

BACKGROUND

Project Description

- Project Location: 631 Torwood Lane, on the east side of Torwood Lane, between Pine Lane and Meadow Lane
- Lot Size: 9,500 square feet
- General Plan Designation: Single-Family, Medium Lot (SF4)
- Zoning Designation: R1-10
- Current Site Conditions: One-story house

The proposed project includes construction of a 972 square-foot first story and 486 square-foot second-story addition to an existing one-story house (see Attachment A – Project Plans). A portion of the front facade facing Torwood Lane is proposed to be removed, effectively eliminating the nonconforming front yard setback of the existing house, and the removal of a garage and breezeway. However, it maintains the current location and width of the driveway, which does not exceed 50% of the required front yard area consistent with the district regulations.

The proposed design of the residence features a neo-eclectic architectural style that blends a variety of decorative techniques from different house styles. The design incorporates elements of a ranch house, with its simplistic massing, practical aesthetic, and stripped-down details, along with modern contemporary architecture, featuring a flat roof, flush-set windows, and minimalistic accents.

The subject property has a total of 11 trees, including two classified as protected trees under the City's Tree Protection Regulations. The proposed project aims to preserve all existing trees, with a comprehensive arborist report confirming no anticipated negative impacts from the development. While specific tree protection guidelines and restrictions are recommended for the protected trees, their preservation aligns with the regulations and ensures a harmonious balance between the property's

landscape aesthetics and safety considerations. By adhering to these measures, the project demonstrates a commitment to complying with the City's Tree Protection Regulations.

ANALYSIS

Design Review

The proposed house complies with the R1-10 district development standards found in Los Altos Municipal Code (LAMC) Chapter 14.06, as demonstrated by the following table:

	Existing	Proposed	Allowed/Required
COVERAGE:	2,338 square feet	2,570 square feet	2,850 square feet
FLOOR AREA:			
1st Floor	2,100 square feet	2,570 square feet	
2nd Floor	-	452 square feet	
Total	2,100 square feet	3,022 square feet	3,325 square feet
SETBACKS:			
Front	22 feet	25 feet	25 feet
Rear	25 feet	25 feet	25 feet
Right side(1 st /2 nd)	7.25 feet/-	7.25 feet/59.17 feet	10 feet/17.5 feet
Left side (1 st /2 nd)	8.25 feet/-	10 feet/17.5 feet	10 feet/17.5 feet
HEIGHT:	15 feet	20.9 feet	27 feet

As per Chapter 14.76 of the LAMC, two-story additions must comply with the Single-Family Residential Design Guidelines. The guidelines suggest that designs in a Diverse Character neighborhood should incorporate some design elements, materials, and scale that are present in the neighborhood while maintaining its own unique design integrity.

Sheet A0.1 of the plan set features a neighborhood context map, illustrating the physical characteristics of the surrounding area, including boundaries, streets, buildings, and natural features. This map provides a visual representation of the neighborhood's context in relation to the proposed project. Additionally, Sheet A0.2 presents streetscape elevations, showcasing the architectural style, size, and massing of the proposed residence in comparison to the neighboring houses. These elevations offer a clear understanding of the design's relationship within the existing streetscape and its relationship to the surrounding structures.

Main House and Second Story Addition

The existing residence is a ranch style with a simple form, low-pitched gable roof, eaves, and rustic materials. The addition uses a more contemporary modern style with a flat roof and rectangular forms. However, the contrast between these two architectural styles maintains the character of the house and neighborhood with simple forms and low roof lines. The proposed building materials include standing seam metal roof, metal cladding siding, wood vertical battens over horizontal wood paneling siding, fiber cement horizontal siding, as well as aluminum-framed windows and doors. The project's material

board is included on Sheet A12. Overall, the design incorporates simple and low-scale forms that produce an integrated appearance with the context of the area.

The front elevation includes expansive first story glass doors and windows opening onto a porch space that is enclosed with a four-foot-tall wall. To enhance the visual appeal, the front elevation features a thoughtful arrangement of simple forms, large windows, and one-story elements positioned on each side of the structure, effectively breaking up the massing. Additionally, the second story is located on the left side of the structure, employing design techniques to minimize its visual impact. This is achieved using a low plate height and prominent banding that accentuates a horizontal appearance. By implementing these strategies, the project effectively reduces the prominence of the second story while creating a visually pleasing emphasis on horizontal elements. This approach not only harmonizes with the overall design but also ensures a balanced integration within the neighborhood context.

With low wall plate heights of eight feet on both levels and an overall height of 20.9 feet, the design ensures the building does not stand out or detract from the overall character of the neighborhood. In a neighborhood with one-story houses that are 14 feet to 17 feet tall and two-story houses that are 22 feet to 26 feet tall, the proposed height of 20.9 feet is shorter than the maximum permitted 27-foot height.

The elevations of the proposed project showcase hipped roofs that wrap around the front, right side, and rear of the house. Additionally, a second-story addition features a flat roof along the left side of the house. The roof design incorporates three accent dormers with shed roof forms that extend from the first-story roof. Two of these dormers face the front, while one is situated towards the rear. This combination of hipped and flat roof forms, along with the shed roof elements, is compatible with the varying architectural styles in the surrounding area. This integration of hipped and flat roof forms with shed roof elements from the neighborhood exemplifies the project's ability to establish its own design integrity while maintaining a cohesive aesthetic within the area.

Bedroom/Study Addition

According to the Residential Design Guidelines, it is important for a house to be designed in a way that aligns with the lot and does not result in a home that stands out excessively within the neighborhood. However, it is worth noting that the bedroom/study addition in this proposed project deviates from the established architectural style, scale, and bulk of the main house. This deviation raises concerns about the compatibility of the addition with the existing house and the immediate neighborhood.

According to the Residential Design Guidelines, it is important to design a house that does not excessively stand out within the neighborhood. The first-floor wall height of 17.2 feet significantly exceeds the typical eight-foot to nine-foot plate heights commonly found in the neighborhood, resulting in a vertical and bulky emphasis that is incongruous with the low scale and massing of neighboring residences. As a result, staff finds the scale and bulk of this portion of the structure does not align with other houses in the immediate neighborhood context.

Additionally, the proposed bedroom/study addition introduces a shed roof form that contrasts with the existing hipped and flat roofs of the main house, raising concerns about its compatibility with the overall architectural style of the neighborhood. The inclusion of the shed roof form further

contributes to the excessive bulk, considering the overall plate height of the existing structure. In order to achieve a more cohesive design, it is recommended to reconsider the roof form of the bedroom/study addition or explore alternative options, such as reducing the overall plate height, to better align with the existing architectural style and bulk of the main house. By addressing these discrepancies, the project can achieve a more compatible and visually appealing aesthetic that conforms to the Residential Design Guidelines.

The Residential Design Guidelines include measures that can help reduce the perception of bulk, which include changing the size of the house, reducing the first story plate heights, avoiding designing from the inside-out, eliminating two-story tall walls, increasing setbacks, and providing large trees or other landscape materials for screening. The goal is to soften the differences between the new construction and the existing houses in the neighborhood structurally, with landscaping used as secondary mitigation to soften bulk and mass. In Diverse Character Neighborhoods a project should be designed to fit in and reflect the scale of the neighborhood. To meet the Design Guidelines and necessary findings or approval, staff recommends that the Zoning Administrator approve the project with the inclusion of Condition No. 3 as provided below:

- In order to minimize bulk, scale, and promote an appropriate relationship to the house and the immediate neighborhood, the project plans submitted as part of the building permit submittal shall be revised to reduce the first-floor plate height of the garage/den addition to a maximum of nine feet six inches.

New or rebuilt landscaping would need to satisfy the Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance requirements should it exceed the 2,500 square-foot landscaping threshold for residential additions (Condition of Approval No. 7). Overall, the existing and proposed landscaping meets the intent of the City's landscape regulations and street tree guidelines.

The proposed project meets the development standards in the R1-10 zoning district and complies with the Single-Family Residential Design Guidelines with the revisions that would be required in Condition No. 3 because it is compatible with the character of the neighborhood as the design maintains an appropriate relationship with adjacent structures, minimizes bulk, and preserves existing trees to the extent possible.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This project is categorically exempt from environmental review under Section 15301 ("Existing Facilities") of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it involves an addition to an existing single-family residence on an existing lot in an area zoned for residential uses.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND CORRESPONDENCE

A public meeting notice was posted on the property, mailed to property owners within 300 feet of the subject site, and published in the Town Crier. The applicant also posted the public notice sign (24" x 36") in conformance with the Planning Division posting requirements.

The applicant sent out letters to 5 neighbors in the immediate area by certified mail. No comments from neighbors have been received by staff as of the writing of this report.

Attachment:

A. Project Plans

Cc: Dominique Price, Applicant/Architect
Motiwala Murtaza and Ali Afroza, Property Owner

FINDINGS

SC22-0020 631 Torwood Lane

With regard to the addition to the existing one-story residence, the Zoning Administrator finds the following in accordance with Section 14.76.060 of the Municipal Code:

- A. The proposed residence complies with all provision of this chapter because the proposed residence is consistent with the development standards of the R1-10 zoning district and policies and implementation techniques described in the Single-Family Residential Design Guidelines.
- B. The height, elevations, and placement on the site of the proposed new house is compatible when considered with reference to the nature and location of residential structures on adjacent lots, and will consider the topographic and geologic constraints imposed by particular building site conditions as the proposed house maintains a similar finished floor elevation and orientation on the lot as the existing house and complies with the allowable floor area, lot coverage, and height maximums as well as the daylight plane requirement pursuant to LAMC Chapter 14.06.
- C. 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 because the trees on the property protected by city ordinance are proposed to remain and there will not be any substantial grade changes nor soil removal to construct the residence. The proposed landscaping including new trees, shrubs, and ground cover will be in keeping with the surrounding neighborhood.
- D. The orientation of the proposed new residence in relation to the immediate neighborhood will minimize the perception of excessive bulk and mass because the proposed structure incorporates architectural design features such as low scale, horizontal eave lines, stone veneer and horizontal siding, building articulation, and roof forms that break up the massing and minimize excessive bulk.
- E. 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. The design incorporates durability, high-quality and architecturally integrated flat membrane and standing seam metal roof, metal cladding siding, wood vertical battens over horizontal wood paneling siding fiber cement horizontal siding, as well as aluminum-framed windows and doors. The size and scale of the building also fits well with the neighborhood, based on overall building height and height of each story.
- F. The proposed residence has been designed to follow the natural contours of the site with minimal grading, minimum impervious cover, and maximum erosion protection because the site is relatively flat and has incorporated softscape and hardscape surfaces into the plan and proposes a drainage plan to minimize off-site stormwater drainage.

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

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GENERAL

1. Expiration

The Design Review Approval will expire on July 19, 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 June 30, 2023 except as may be modified by these conditions.

3. Bedroom/Den Plate Height

In order to minimize bulk, scale and promote an appropriate relationship to the house and the immediate neighborhood, the project plans submitted as part of the Building Permit submittal shall be revised to reduce the first-floor plate height of the garage/den addition to a maximum of nine feet six inches.

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. Protected Trees

Tree Nos. T-3, and T-6 to T-10 as shown on Sheet A0.9 shall be protected under this application and cannot be removed without a tree removal permit from the Development Services Director. The tree protection plan outlined in the arborist report (Fertile Earth Tree & Land Care, dated 2/5/22) shall be incorporated into the building permit plans and implemented before and during construction.

6. 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.

7. 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 2,500 square feet or more of new or replaced landscape area, including irrigated planting areas, turf areas, and water features is proposed. Any project with an aggregate landscape area of 2,500 square feet or less may conform to the prescriptive measures contained in Appendix D of the City's Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance.

8. Underground Utility and Fire Sprinkler Requirements

New residences and 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.

9. 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

10. Conditions of Approval

Incorporate the conditions of approval into the title page of the plans and provide a letter which explains how each condition of approval has been satisfied and/or which sheet of the plans the information can found.

11. Tree Protection Note

On the grading plan and/or the site plan, show all tree/landscape 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.”

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. Air Conditioners

The plans shall show the location of any air conditioning unit(s) on the site plan including the model number of the unit(s) and nominal size of the unit. The Applicant shall 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. Storm Water Management

The Plans shall 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 areas, etc.).

18. California Water Service Upgrades

The Applicant is 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.

19. Underground Utility Location

The Plans shall show the location of underground utilities pursuant to Chapter 12.68 of the Municipal Code. Underground utility trenches shall avoid the driplines of all protected trees unless approved by the project arborist and the Planning Division.

PRIOR TO ISSUANCE OF BUILDING OR DEMOLITION PERMIT

20. Tree Protection

Tree protection fencing shall be installed around the driplines of trees Nos. T-3, and T-6 to T-10 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.

21. 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

22. Landscaping Installation

All landscaping materials, including plants or trees intended to provide privacy screening, as provided on the approved landscape plans shall be installed prior to final inspection.

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).