



DATE: November 1, 2023

AGENDA ITEM #3

TO: Nick Zornes, Zoning Administrator
FROM: Sean Gallegos, Senior Planner
SUBJECT: SC23-0008 – 1014 Seena Avenue

RECOMMENDATION

Approve design review application SC23-0008 for the construction of a new 3,876 square foot, two-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 15303 (“New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures”).

BACKGROUND

Project Description

- Project Location: 1014 Seena Avenue, on the southwest corner of Seena Avenue and Covington Road
- Lot Size: 11,282 square feet
- General Plan Designation: Single-Family, Medium Lot (SF4)
- Zoning Designation: R1-10
- Current Site Conditions: One-story house

The proposed project includes the demolition of an existing one-story house and replacement with a new two-story house with 2,337 square feet on the first story and 1,539 square feet on the second story (see Attachment A – Project Plans).

The new residence uses a Contemporary inspired architectural design with shed roof elements and simple modern forms. The house is consistent with the identifying features of a modern style that include low slope roofs, large fiberglass frame windows, horizontal cedar, and stucco siding surfaces, and unornamented wall surfaces with no decorative detailing at the doors or windows. A recessed covered porch is proposed at the front entry and a covered pergola is proposed at the rear portion of the residence. The proposed building materials, which include composition shingle roof, smooth stucco siding, stained cedar siding, wood doors and black fiberglass windows, reflect a high level of quality. Overall, the project’s detailing and materials maintain an appropriate relationship to the rustic qualities of the area and are compatible with the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

The proposed design of the residence maintains the front façade facing Seena Avenue as well as the vehicular access to the garage.

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: | 1,840 square feet | 2,614 square feet | 3,385 square feet |
| FLOOR AREA: | | | |
| 1st Floor | 1,840 square feet | 1,920 square feet | |
| 2nd Floor | - | 1,539 square feet | |
| Total | 1,840 square feet | 3,876 square feet | 3,878 square feet |
| SETBACKS: | | | |
| Front | 25 feet | 25 feet | 25 feet |
| Rear | 25 feet | 25 feet | 25 feet |
| Right Exterior side (Covington Rd) | 16.5 feet/- 10 feet/- | 16.5 feet/27 feet 10 feet/19.9 feet | 16.5 feet 10 feet/17.5 feet |
| Left side (1 st /2 nd) | | | |
| HEIGHT: | 15 feet | 25.4 feet | 27 feet |

The 82-foot-wide lot is considered a narrow lot due to its width being less than 90 feet on a corner lot. As per Section 14.06.08.E.1, narrow lots are subject to specific setback requirements. The exterior side yard setback for narrow lots should be twenty percent of the average lot width, with a minimum of ten feet. The interior side yard setback for lots greater than 80 feet comply with subsection A of the section, which requires a minimum setback of ten feet. Consequently, the project is permitted to have a first story and second story exterior side yard setback of 16.5 feet.

As per Chapter 14.76 of the LAMC, new two-story residences 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. The proposed design follows this recommendation and will be compatible with the surrounding properties.

The neighborhood context map, depicted on Sheet A-2 of the plan set, provides a visual representation of the physical characteristics of the neighborhood, including its boundaries, streets, buildings, and natural features.

The overall bulk and scale of the front elevation is broken up with multiple shed roof forms, horizontal eaves lines, and porch entry. The series of shed roof forms results in a layered appearance and a structure that is well articulated, which helps to break up the horizontal and vertical planes. The second story is softened due to being recessed into the roof form along the front elevation and centered over the first-story massing at the sides of the house and large second-story setbacks. The architect has worked with staff to soften the two-story verticality through the use of different materials

on the exterior of the building. The proposed use of stucco and wood siding material on the first story also helps to visually break down the massing of the first story and create a more visually interesting façade.

The proposed wall plate heights for this structure are set at 10 feet for the first story and nine feet for the second story. Although a ten-foot first-story plate exceeds the standard plate heights observed in the neighborhood, the applicant has made an effort to mitigate this by maintaining a low finished floor height of just eight inches. This strategic choice effectively reduces the visual bulk of the house. As a result, the new construction remains consistent with the scale of the neighboring residences, which typically feature plate heights ranging from eight to nine feet. This approach ensures that the building's appearance is consistent with its surroundings and does not appear overly large or incongruous when viewed from the street.

The low-pitched roof and roof form contribute to reducing the perceived bulk of the structure. The first-story roof form and horizontal eave line breaks up the wall plane, while the building's articulation and roof forms at the second story break down the massing into smaller portions, making the building visually interesting and less bulky.

The subject property includes a total of nine protected trees as outlined in the city's Tree Protection Regulations. Tree Nos. 3, 10, and 11 are designated to be retained, while tree numbers 4 through 9 are scheduled for removal. The arborist report recommends removing six trees (No. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9) within the house or improvement area, in line with criterion No. 3 for property enjoyment, involving economic and aesthetic factors. New trees will be planted on the property for privacy, and existing trees (Nos. 3, 10 and 11) will be kept. The landscaping plan will comply with the Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance, which requires water-efficient landscaping for new residences with landscaping over 500 square feet.

Staff recommends the inclusion of condition No. 3 which calls for the planting of four new Class I or II street trees from the City's Street Tree Planting List with a minimum size of 15-gallon or 24-inch box consistent with Section 11.08.90 of the Tree Protection Ordinance, which permits one or more replacement trees for each protected tree removed from a site. Consistent with the Residential Guidelines, replacement trees are necessary to soften the impact and view of new construction and shall be 15 gallon in size or larger.

The proposed project meets the development standards in the R1-10 zoning district and complies with the Single-Family Residential Design Guidelines 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 15303 (“New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures”) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it involves the construction of a single-family dwelling in a residential zone.

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 ten 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: Mohammad Kasirossafar, Applicant/Architect
Guy Kramarski, Property Owner

FINDINGS

SC23-0008 1014 Seena Avenue

With regard to the proposed new two-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 main or accessory structure or addition, 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 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 subject property includes a total of nine protected trees as outlined in the city's Tree Protection Regulations. Tree Nos. 3, 10, and 11 are designated to be retained, while tree numbers 4 through 9 are scheduled for removal. The arborist report recommends removing six trees (No. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9) within the house or improvement area, in line with criterion No. 3 for property enjoyment, involving economic and aesthetic factors. 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 because the proposed structure incorporates architectural design features such as low scale, horizontal eave lines, smooth stucco and horizontal siding, building articulation, and roof forms that break up the massing and minimize excessive bulk. The series of shed roof forms results in a layered appearance and a structure that is well articulated, which helps to break up the horizontal and vertical planes. The second story is softened due to being recessed into the roof form along the front elevation and centered over the first-story massing at the sides of the house and large second-story setbacks.
- E. General architectural considerations, including the size and scale, 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 on the same project site. The design incorporates durability, high-quality and architecturally integrated composition shingle roof, smooth stucco siding, stained cedar siding, wood doors and black fiberglass windows. The size and scale of the building also fits well with buildings on the same site, 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

SC23-0008 1014 Seena Avenue

GENERAL

1. Expiration

The Design Review Approval will expire on November 1, 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 September 27, 2023 except as may be modified by these conditions.

3. Replacement Trees

The project plans shall be revised to show the planting of four new Class I or II street trees from the City's Street Tree list. These trees should have a minimum size of 15-gallon or 24-inch box .

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. 3, 10 and 11 as shown on Sheet A-5 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 (Monarch Consulting Arborists, dated 8/8/2023) shall be incorporated into the building permit plans and implemented before and during construction.

6. Tree Removal Approved

Trees Nos. 4 to 9 shown to be removed on plan Sheet A-5 of the approved set of plans are hereby approved for removal. Tree removal shall not occur until a building permit is submitted and shall only occur after the issuance of a demolition permit or building permit. Exceptions to this condition may be granted by the Development Services Director upon submitting written justification.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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

11. 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 be found.

12. 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.”

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. 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.

16. 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.

17. Underground Utility Location

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.

18. Mechanical Equipment

The plans shall show the location of any mechanical equipment (including air conditioning units) on the site plan. All equipment must be located to comply with the City's Noise Control Ordinance (Chapter 6.16) and Mechanical Equipment Ordinance (Chapter 11.14).

19. 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 areas, etc.).

PRIOR TO ISSUANCE OF BUILDING OR DEMOLITION PERMIT

20. Tree Protection

Tree protection fencing shall be installed around the driplines, or as required by the project arborist, of trees Nos. 3, 10 and 11as 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 with 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 and Verification

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. The applicant shall also 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.

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).