

March 30, 2025

To:

Nick Zornes

Members of the City of Los Altos Planning Commission:

Joe Beninato, Chair

Richard Roche, Vice Chair

Mehruss Jon Ahi

Eric Steinle

Susan Mensinger

Kate Disney

Jonathan D. Weinberg

Stephanie Williams

Los Altos City Hall

1 North San Antonio Road

Los Altos, CA 94022

**Subject: Sherwood Avenue Homes: Residential Zoning Designation**

Dear Members of the Planning Commission,

We are writing to you as the homeowners along the east side of Sherwood Avenue. We are supportive of the city's current effort to repeal the Sherwood Gateway plan and align zoning to the city and our needs. Thank you for your diligence and efforts.

In particular, we would like to share more information about six parcels: the homes at 899, 905, 911, 921, 933, and 941 Sherwood Avenue. We want to bring to your attention that these parcels, which make up the majority of the east side of Sherwood, are actively used today as single-family homes. We invite you to come visit these homes to understand how they are used today.

These parcels are contiguous and have been used consistently as residences even prior to the adoption of the Sherwood Gateway Plan. Although we support repealing the Sherwood Gateway Plan, we have critical objections to a blanket Commercial Thoroughfare designation. One of the challenges we face is that the Sherwood Gateway Plan and CN zoning actively discouraged improvements or updates, including expansion of the existing homes and exterior improvements.

We respectfully request to have the current usage of these parcels and our homes consistent with appropriate zoning, such as R1, and enable expansion and improvements for these homes, which have been held stagnant for over 25 years. Our request is to make the current use of the homes and respective zoning clear and consistent: update these parcels to be R1 and enable future expansion and improvements to our homes.

This would:

- **Recognize Use of Parcels as Homes:** The homes ranging from 899 to 941 Sherwood have been used consistently as residences, serving as homes and as much-needed space for families in Los Altos. Their use as residences predates the adoption of the Sherwood Gateway Plan and the homes have retained their residential use since implementation of the plan, despite the major obstacles to improvement. This demonstrates a strong and persistent residential character that contradicts the current commercial zoning and would also contradict future CT zoning.
- **Preserve Existing Housing Stock:** Residential zoning would formally acknowledge and protect the existing single-family homes, ensuring their continued contribution to the City's housing stock. These homes have been here since before the incorporation of Los Altos as a city in 1952.
- **Align Updates with Contiguous Residential Character:** The homes are directly contiguous with townhome residential development and with one another. This existing residential nature was solidified by the 2013 townhome residential development behind these parcels, fundamentally altering the contiguous land use pattern to be residential. There is a major disconnect between having zoning that is the same for these homes and families as there is for BevMo! on El Camino.
- **Reduce Troubling Inconsistencies:** The gap between the actual usage of these as homes and commercial zoning has resulted in confusion and inconsistency in what is allowed to be added or altered in our homes. These parcels maintain a legal nonconforming status, indicating their historical and continued residential use. The legal nonconforming status has effectively left these families in development limbo for over 26 years. We are actively asking for the city to make this right and to not repeat the same error of the Sherwood Gateway Plan.
- **Revitalize Stagnant Improvement:** The current CN zoning severely restricts our ability to make exterior improvements and add any livable square footage, thus discouraging any development. We have extreme concerns that the CT zoning would do the same. This limitation to make even modest improvements negatively impacts the residential neighborhood character.
- **Support Small Homes in Need of Expansion:** The primary structures average 938 sq. ft., despite each owner's desire to expand. Numerous previous owners have failed to have permits approved and faced major obstacles, forcing them to sell or rent at low occupancy once their families grew. There is also significant contradiction in allowing these homeowners to pursue ADUs, which we gladly support, yet not allowing them to add to their main structures.
- **Facilitate Modest Improvements and ADU Development:** R1 zoning would enable homeowners to explore the development of additional space in their homes to make space for larger families.

- **Recognize Realities of Best Use and Ownership Structure:** The current ownership pattern is fragmented. The best and most valuable use of the parcels is residential single-family homes (with ADUs) as confirmed by property appraisers.
- **Make the Best of Limited Lot Sizes:** These parcels are smaller than the typical ¼ acre/10k sq. ft. Los Altos lot and are narrow. This makes higher density improvements unpalatable to developers who would need to pay exorbitant amounts to acquire every contiguous parcel.
- **Support Residential Zoning Due to Unviability of CT Zoning:** Our view is that the lots are not practically viable for commercial development. The existing land configuration, residential adjacency, and parcel sizes render them unsuitable for effective commercial use. This impracticality is exacerbated by the fact that significant property aggregation, crucial for viable development, is highly unlikely due to the diverse and fragmented ownership patterns.
- **Increase Property Tax Revenue:** Freeing up restrictions for owners to improve their lots will provide the City of Los Altos and Santa Clara County additional tax revenue.

Given the contiguous residential character, the consistent and persistent residential usage, the troubling inconsistencies faced with commercial zoning, and the practical unviability of commercial development on these lots, we respectfully urge the city to rezone these parcels to R1 and assure our ability to improve and expand our homes. We ask you to put our homes and families at the heart of your decision making.

We appreciate your consideration of this matter and welcome the opportunity to discuss it further.

Sincerely,

Thomas DiRocco and Carolina DiRocco, 921 Sherwood Avenue

Udom Dwivedi and Shalvi Dwivedi, 941 Sherwood Avenue

David Tabuchi and Nancy Tabuchi, 911 Sherwood Avenue

Scott Fujimoto, 905 Sherwood Avenue