



Planning Department
Community Development Department, Town of Los Gatos
110 E. Main Street
Los Gatos, CA 95030

July 21, 2021

**Re: The Bouknight Residence, 145* Wood Road
Project Description/ Letter of Justification**

To Whom it May Concern:

On behalf of Omari and Kavita Bouknight and their young family, I am pleased to present this project for an Architecture and Site application. The proposed project includes the construction of a new three-story home with an attached two car garage. This letter, accompanies the building plans and additional exhibits, contains descriptions of the property, the neighborhood, and how the proposed development complies with the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines.

DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING PROPERTY

Access

The property is located approximately at the end of the public portion of Wood Road. Since an official address number has yet to be assigned, a new address application proposing 145 Wood Road for the subject property will be submitted. The 29,632 sq. ft. (0.68 Acre) vacant property is currently accessed from a shared access road (also called Wood Road) that serves five other properties uphill including 138 Wood Road, which borders the eastern and southern sides of the subject property. A Lot Line Adjustment was completed in 2016 and an easement was established at 138 Wood Road to provide ingress/egress and utilities access to the subject property.

Topography

The site has a north-east facing slope that averages at 35%. This is an undeveloped site with no existing driveway or building pad. A least restrictive development area (LRDA) was outlined on areas that are under 30% slope for the proposed building area, which happens to coincide with a natural clearing that is void of trees. Several mature oak trees cover the northern portion of the property, with several more oaks located in the lower apron area. The southern portion (along the "front" property line facing Wood Road) has a relatively steep exposed cut bank that was created when Wood Road was created. Lastly, an old, graded dirt path that branches off the shared access road also runs along the lower apron area and along the northern border. Apart from being visible to the adjacent Draa Residence at 138 Wood Road, the property is relatively private and isolated.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED RESIDENCE

Early Development and challenges:

Using the initial driveway concept (developed during the lot line adjustment) where the driveway will enter from the high side of the property, a multi-story home was planned. Parking, truck turnaround area, garage and the main living spaces were all planned on the upper floor at elevation 744' and the remaining bedrooms were planned on the lower floor with a small basement. Where so much of the flat area was used by parking and the truck turnaround, the house was pushed forward and was considerably taller, bulkier all without being integrated into the hillside landscape. The construction of the hair pin shaped driveway would also require a large amount of grading and tall retaining walls. Overall we decided that it was not the best integration between the house and the property.

Final design and solutions:

A very limited LRDA and a strict hillside height plane have led us to the current proposed design: to enter the property from the lower apron area, to split the footprint of the house into 3 stories and to better incorporate the building mass to the slope of the hill. The new driveway follows the contours of the lot and steers around the existing trees. The turnaround area at the lower end of the house also allows for a more conventional configuration: with a garage and entry on the lower level, the main living areas and master suite on the middle (second) level and the remainder of the bedrooms on the upper (third) level. The proposed house is located entirely within the LDRA.

In addition to terracing the home as to reduce the overall massing, a sizable amount of the lower (84%) and main floor (37%) areas are located below grade in order to reduce visible bulk and mass. As a result, the proposed floor area is 3,246 sf, less than the maximum allowed floor area of 3,900sf (calculated using an adjusted net lot of 11,852 sf).

Visibility:

A visibility study was conducted using certified story-poles and the Town's designated viewing areas. Several mature and dense live oak trees provide significant screening for a good percentage of the house. However at the viewing area intersecting Hwy 9 and Hwy 17, parts of the east elevation, including part of the main floor and the upper floor façade, are visible. None of the other elevations are visible to any of the viewing areas.

The tier configuration of the building mass, while does not reflect well on the orthogonal view of the east elevation, can be seen on the north and south elevations where it follows the natural contour of the lot. The main level is set back about 19.5 ft from the lower floor, and the upper level is set back about 35.5ft to 41.5ft from the main level. The resulting arrangement effectively reduces the overall building mass and visibility.

Connectivity and outdoor spaces

Circulation and outdoor spaces are high priorities of the owners. A large, covered porch that wraps around the lower floor provides shelter and exterior definition. It also supports the main level exterior entertaining spaces (loggia, trellis, side balcony) as the hillside doesn't allow for conventional, widespread yards. A series of access stairs are also incorporated on the south and north-west side of the house to allow for egress, air and light, or simply to walk around the house. A modest yard/patio space is planned at the upper level outside the upper family room with a small lap pool on the private side of the property. The house itself has 5 bedrooms and 6

baths. The 3 levels are connected on the inside via a grand stairway as well as an elevator. There are doors on each level that lead to the outdoor spaces.

Site Access:

As mentioned earlier, a 14' wide driveway is proposed thru the lower apron area downhill from the property. An odd shaped appendage of the neighboring property will allow a more drivable access route with minimal grading cut and fill. A few retaining walls were planned 1) at the corner of the fire truck turnaround area and 2) around the existing oak grove to protect tree roots. Lastly, in order to allow for a smooth 5% slope transition from Wood Road and at the truck turnaround area, a middle section of the driveway is proposed to have a 20% slope with a proposed fire department exception. By comparison, the existing Wood Road is about 25% in slope so we believe the proposal is reasonable.

Neighbor Outreach:

We have been in close contact with the owners of 138 Wood Road (The Draa Family) as well as other families that share the same private road about the proposed development. They have shown great support for the house and driveway arrangement, and appreciate our effort of preserving the existing oak trees and the natural appearance of the lot facing Wood Road.

EXCEPTIONS

Below is a list of our effort of minimizing the scope of the exceptions requested for the project and our justifications.

III. SITE PLANNING

A. Grading: (refer to exception exhibit on A1.2 and landscape plans)

- Fill exception at the northern corner of the turnaround area (driveway): fire protection standards require the entire turnaround area to be flat with a max slope of no more than 5%, after trying out different configurations and looking at possible locations on site, we believe that the proposed shape and location of the turnaround area will require the least amount of grading and disturbance to existing trees. This corner, together with its retaining walls, will be screened by the oak grove and not be visible to any neighbors.
- Fill exception at driveway including the turn-out area: see driveway slope exception below. The maximum fill exception is about 5.7ft of fill at the turn-out corner. Turn-out area is required for driveway longer than 150 feet with widths less than 18 feet to prevent the obstruction of emergency vehicles. The average fill within the exception area is between 3-4 ft.
- Cut exception for the rear yard: please refer to the landscape architect's justification letter for the backyard design. The amount of cut exception areas have been greatly reduced from the original design with only a small corner requiring a cut exception of 5.8 ft.

C. Driveway slope: (refer to civil sheet 5)

- In order to allow for a smooth 5% slope transition from Wood Road, as well as to keep the entire turnaround area at a level 5% slope, we need to make up the elevation difference with the mid-section of the driveway. Keeping it at 15% slope will require a longer driveway, which can encroach into the existing trees, or require an excessive amount of cuts and fills. In contrast, proposing a 20% slope, while acceptable from the driver's experience, is a better solution to the site contour and layout.

D. Setback Encroachment: (refer to architectural site plan on A1)

- Three (3) above ground water tanks are proposed to meet the Fire Protection requirements. Because of their bulky size our main concern is to shield them from the neighbors' view (Wood Road) and out of the east side setback. That leaves the north side of the property as our only option. Next we want to locate them away from existing trees, as well as to allow adequate clearance from the main structure (FD requirement). The proposed location encroaches into the side setback by 10 ft. It will be "flatter" than the rest of the hill and hopefully, require less grading. Lastly, the visibility study has shown that the water tanks will be screened by trees and not visible to the foothill. Stepped platforms and a balance of cut and fill are planned to avoid grading and retaining wall exceptions.

V. ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

C. Building Height: (refer to front elevations on A7-8 and sections on A9-10)

- Over the 28ft maximum low-to-high dimension for visible homes.
With a restrictive development area and a maximum 18ft height plane we need to break up the floor areas into multiple levels. A three-story arrangement was chosen to split the floor areas into the most appropriate portions in order to follow the contour of the hill. It allows for thoughtful balance of below-grade and above-grade volumes given the existing slope, while connecting an approvable driveway at the bottom of the hill to the upper backyard. In addition, it provides better access to air/daylight, views and outdoor recreational spaces. As a result, the east elevation, even with a stepped arrangement, has resulted with a low-to-high dimension that exceeds 28 ft (max: 34'-9").

In comparison, developing a two-story arrangement under a 18 ft height plane would result in the following problems which steered us away from that direction:

- Both levels will require significantly increased amounts of grading, and/or
- The building will need to encroach into the LRDA which involves building over 30% slope
- It will require a steeper driveway with slope over 20%, which is usually not approvable by the Fire Department, in order to arrive at the garage level
- The larger building footprint will leave no room for a backyard, or the grade difference between the house and the surrounding finish grade would be too great for a possible yard space.

Other considerations made on controlling building height and mass:

- Worked with the 18ft high plane (instead of the 25 ft high plane allows for non-visible homes)
 - Used a stepped back configuration to reduce building height and mass: main level is stepped back 19.5ft from the lower level. Upper level is stepped back between 35.5ft to 49.75ft from the main level.
 - Reduced portion of the main floor ceiling to 9' instead of the 10' general ceiling height.
 - Used vaulted ceiling technique rather than high walls to create volume.
 - Opted for low pitch roof slopes with minimum or no attic space.
- Over the 18ft building height plane (at the loggia corner):

The only area that remains above the 18 ft height plane is a portion of the loggia roof corner. The extent of the roof is essential to the loggia and lowering it to be below the 18 ft height plane will prohibit door operation and usability of the space. Secondly, the visibility study has shown that this portion of the roof is screened by trees. With these reasons we are asking for an exception to allow the roof to remain as planned.

VI. SITE ELEMENTS

C. Retaining walls: (refer to landscape and civil plans)

The use of site retaining walls has been carefully thought-out at the following areas:

- The rear yard plan has been updated with a tier configuration; it avoids creating large flat areas and to keep the retaining walls to below 5ft high. Refer to landscape architect's justification letter for more details.
- Retaining walls are added along a portion of the driveway to avoid creating backfills against existing trees, as recommended by the town's arborist.
- Lastly a portion of retaining wall exceeding the 5ft high is needed at the fire truck turn-around corner in order to provide a level 5% area for the entire turnaround area.

COMPLIANCE WITH HILLSIDE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS & GUIDELINES

In addition to what was identified above, the proposed home specifically addresses the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines as follows:

Site Planning:

- The new home has been sited to maintain privacy of neighboring properties (II.C.G2)
- The siting of the house in relation to Wood Road reduces the driveway length and grading impacts
- All of the perimeter trees have been preserved;
- Design to be neighbor friendly: offsetting the driveway approach from the neighbor's and keeping the house back and at a lower height plane.

Harmony and Compatibility:

- Given the hillside setting, with minimal neighbors for architectural context, the property allows for some freedom in exterior styling. The contemporary Mediterranean style responds very well to the design intent of the HDG&S in that it blends with this natural setting.

Scale and Mass:

- The multi-story home steps down the slope and the massing is tucked into the hillside. Proposed structure is kept under 18 feet.
- The house has been designed with simple forms and hipped rooflines, as well as varying wall planes that break up each elevation into smaller units.

Exterior Materials:

- Materials are natural to blend with the environment
- All meet stringent WUI classified fire resistant materials.
- All exterior surfaces to meet the 30 LRV weighted average requirement.

Privacy:

- With the proposed residence set into the hill, the majority of the windows are directed downhill and away from the nearby neighbors.
- The proposed driveway is relocated downhill of the residence to allow for an offset driveway approach from the neighbor's.
- The outdoor gathering areas such as loggia and future pool are located on the private side of the residence, away from the public road and the adjacent neighbors.

CONCLUSION

Designing a home on this site has proven to be quite challenging. In particular, the extremely constrained development area, the steep slope and visibility of the site have complicated the effort. Several iterations of the design and extensive analysis were required before we submitted our design application. Through a collaborative process with the Town's Development Team, we further tweaked and improved different building and site components, including grading and retaining walls usages, fire access and protection measures, creative planning of the yard and and outdoor recreational spaces, to arrive at this present version.

In the end, I am very happy with the results. The size, mass, color and exterior style of this house are in keeping with the intent of the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines. Through the use of the hillside guidelines and a few exception requests, we hope to achieve the owners' goals, makes the best use of the property and respect the neighborhood and its natural environment. We appreciate your time to review our application and hope to get your support and approval.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gary Kohlsaatt", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gary Kohlsaatt
Architect C19245



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Mr. Sean Mullin
Associate Planner
Town of Los Gatos

The following letter applies to the area covered by the landscape plans only, sheets L1.0-L4.0. For justification of areas other than the landscape plans please see documents from the architect and civil engineer.

This project was previously submitted and reviewed by staff. As a result of comments received from the staff review and other considerations the rear yard of the house has been redesigned. Revisions were made to be more responsive to the topography and to minimize grading, retaining wall heights, and the need for exceptions.

The original submittal

The original rear yard was created by a single retaining wall with a graded slope above it. This resulted in a flat area that, while usable, was determined by the staff to not be consistent with the HDS&G restrictions on grading to create flat area. In addition, that design as proposed would have required a major grading exception.

A new swimming pool was also proposed, with the staff review noting that part of the pool extended beyond the LRDA.

Revised landscape design

The proposed site for the house and yards is a sloping site off of Wood Road. The design of the house steps up the hill and has an overall low profile. Because of the placing of the house on the site, any rear yard development would have very few if any visibility issues.

There is a desire on the part of the owners to have an outdoor space behind the house that would be served by doors from the family room on the upper floor. The area behind the house slopes up to the rear property line and would need grading and retaining walls to accommodate the outdoor functions desired by the owners, while keeping as close as possible to the Town standards and guidelines.

The owners requested that the yard include a swimming pool, spa, and some space for dining or outdoor seating. And, if possible, a shade structure.

We were able to achieve the items desired by the owners while dramatically reducing the amount of grading and the magnitude of exceptions required by the original design. This was achieved by dividing the rear yard into two terraces rather than the one large space proposed in the original design.

The shape of the slope behind the house is not uniform resulting in areas that needed more cut than others, which is typical of hillsides. The design attempts to balance the desire for outdoor area with an adherence to the grading standards. The resulting proposal has some areas that will require Grading Policy exceptions. The majority of the design complies with the Grading Policy. The overall result is modest areas behind the house that can be used for outdoor living with less grading than the original.

The upper terrace includes the pool, spa, and a small seating area. The lower terrace provides additional seating area and a small shade structure.

The use of terracing has created a design that more closely conforms with the hillside above the house. This has reduced the grading exception of the original submittal from 4 feet to less than 2 feet in all cases, and less than a foot in the majority of areas. Many of the areas of cut conform to the grading standards and will need no exceptions at all. All of the retaining walls have all been kept to a height of feet or less. In the small areas that need fill, none of them will require a grading exception.

Meeting the desire for outdoor space is always a challenge in the hillsides and rarely can all of the owners desires be met. In this case we have designed spaces that can be used by the owners with minor exceptions needed to the HDS&G. The areas behind the home will enhance the living experience of the owners, while not visually impact any of the surrounding areas, and will keep earthwork in line with the spirit of the Hillside Standards and Guidelines.

If you have any questions on this letter or the updated plans please give me a call at 408-761-0212 or by email at david@foxla.net.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Fox', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Fox
Landscape Architect
CA lic. 1966/5053