



A R C H I T E C T U R E

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

August 19, 2021

**Re: The Bouknight Residence, 145\* Wood Road  
Addendum to Planning Commission Review**

Dear Mr Mullin:

This letter outlines our responses to the direction given by the Planning Commissioners on July 28 2021 when they considered our A&S application for the Bouknight residence, and accompanies revised plans and exhibits. We appreciate the opportunity to work with the Planning Commission and trust that the outlined proposal directly addresses the areas of concern highlighted during the meeting. In summary, the Planning Commission raised concerns regarding exceptions requested on the home's proposed low-to-high height limit. The original home design was noted to have a visibility ratio of 34.9% from one of the designated viewing areas, which is greater than the 24.5% standard. As such, a more restrictive low-to-high height limit was to be applied and thus the exception request and the noted concerns. Finally, there was some concern regarding the size of the home in relation to the surrounding properties.

As proposed during the July 28 review meeting, we have explored a combination of design changes related to the height of the home as well as adding natural screening to decrease the visibility ratio to or below the 24.5% standard, which would obviate the need to issue a low-to-high height limit exception. Beyond the aforementioned proposal to reduce height and visibility, we have completed our due diligence on questions regarding the so-called 'Old Wood Road' ROW and related easement rights. Our position on the ROW remains unchanged; after carefully reviewing all available documents there is no evidence that a Right of Way exists in that location. While we also don't believe there is a recorded private easement, we are willing to work with the neighbor offline and can state with confidence that any development would respect such potential easement.

#### **FLOOR AREA**

The above grade area for the proposed home is 3,295 sf, where the Town's limit is placed at 3,900 sf. There are two homes on Wood Road listed in the staff report that are much larger than this one (4,609 sf and 4,594 sf). In addition to the listed properties, there are two homes omitted from the list that we contend should be included in the discussion. Both of these properties have been included on our Overall Site Plan (Sheet A-1) from the beginning. The first one, a whopper, is 150 Wood Road, which is just beyond this property, is clearly visible from the viewing area and is 8,940 sf. The second property, 100 Clifton Ave, is *directly* adjacent to our property, is also highly visible and totals out at 4,557 sf.

In the near future, Mr. Ebrahimi's property (adjacent- above and to the west of ours) surely will seek a highest and best use sized development of at least one but possibly two homes. The Draa's property at 138 Wood road is 2,808 sf but could be due for a major addition as the property can easily support up to 6,000 sf. In this context, the proposed home of 3,295 square feet is not overly large in relation to the neighborhood.

## VISIBILITY

### Topography

The site has a very narrow development area that is defined by the front setback line on the south side and the least restrictive development area (LRDA) boundary line to the north. This buildable area varies in width between 60 feet at the bottom to approximately 75 feet towards the top. The LRDA does not allow for the house to be spread along the contours so a tiered approach makes the most sense. The house is not only tiered up the slope by bunkering in a good majority of the floor area, it also is divided into 3 sections that progressively step back and follow the angles of the contour lines. This approach greatly breaks up any large expansive walls and mass and keeps the height of the home below the 18 ft vertical plane (Standard for homes which are deemed “visible”).

While roughly half of the buildable area is well screened, the southern “third” of this area is exposed to the visibility platform at the Hwy 9/17 interchange. Since we have such a limited area in which to build, this portion of land needs to be utilized and therefore attributes to the majority of the visible portion of the house. The original house had a 34.9% visibility ratio and an overall height of 34'-9".

## TWO STEP APPROACH

### Architecture

First, we explored and evaluated ways to lower the height of the house. As noted in the hearing, there is not much if any leeway to reduce the floor to floor heights, so we focused our attention on the uppermost floor, which is the primary contributor to the visibility. The original roof was hipped and had ceiling heights varying between 9'- 9" and 10'-9". The modified design lowers the ceiling heights to 9 ft and 10 feet respectively, as well as flattening out the roof. The commutative reduction in height is a full 3 feet on the bedroom section (the southern and most visible section) and 2 feet on the Family Room corner (north side). By doing this, the overall height (Low to High) has been reduced from 34'-9" to 32'-9". This height reduction also results in a 2.9% reduction to the visibility ratio, taking it from 34.9% to 32.0%.

While we were able to make significant strides in reducing both height and visibility, we feel the architecture retains its character and style. The flat roof is not visible from most view angles and retains the overhang and corbel detail that matches the rest of the house.

### Screening Trees

Several mature oak trees cover the northern portion of the property, with several more oaks located in the lower apron area that effectively screen the majority of the proposed residence. At the suggestion of the planning commission, we have completed extensive studies using computer simulation to evaluate how effective adding new trees would be in further reducing the visibility ratio. We have been pleased to find that trees can indeed be positioned to provide excellent screening results.

## PROCESS

As part of the process of identifying appropriate screening trees, we felt it critical to identify indigenous trees that had sufficient height and screening potential. We determined that the trees need to be a minimum of 18 feet tall to achieve necessary screening, with a growth potential to reach the desired height to be anywhere between 22-25 feet tall within a reasonable amount of time. The list is short and includes Oaks, Redwoods and Cedars. We did not consider California Bay trees as they have been found to be the prime carrier of SODS (Sudden Oak Death Syndrome).



Deodar Cedars have more openings within the branch structure and are not solid enough for our purposes. Oaks, especially Coast Live Oaks, are evergreen and have relatively solid canopies. However, there are two significant issues with Coast Live Oaks: One issue relates to size and the second relates to the growth rate. To get our desired starting size between 18-20 feet, the box size is substantial (108" size) and the projected cost of upwards of \$25,000 per tree (planted) becomes prohibitive; several trees are needed. The bigger problem is trees of this size take several years to get established and begin to grow again. In contrast, smaller oaks (24"- 36" box sizes) "take" right away and grow much faster, but they start around 8-10 feet in height and would take a good 10-15 years to reach the necessary heights.

We are ultimately proposing indigenous Redwoods, which not only are available in 18'-6" heights (see attached photo from Devil Mountain Nursery) but also have a projected 2 feet annual growth rate. This, along with their dense structure make Redwoods our tree of choice. The proposal is to purchase 60" box size Redwoods (18'-6" ft tall) this fall, then contract with the grower to nurture them so they continue to grow at the nursery until ready to be planted. We have already consulted with the nursery and are prepared to move forward. Using this approach, the new trees would easily be 20 feet tall if not more at time of planting, which could be done once the majority of the work is completed, or approximately one year after breaking ground.

Working with the topo and view corridor, we strategically positioned 3 groups of Redwoods (8 total) at different elevations in the apron area to create natural layered screening. Each tree is numbered on both the site plan and the visibility renderings to allow us to pinpoint these trees. Computer simulation then allows us to accurately analyze the screening potential.

The revised Visibility Screening Study depicts the trees and the proposed home (with modified upper roofs) at three stages: Time of planting, after one and two years time. The corresponding visibility calculations show the progression; after 2 years from the time of planting, these trees are projected to grow to approximately 24'-6" in height- enough to effectively reduce the visibility ratio to less than 24.5%.

We have also completed a review of our easement rights and it is clear that the Bouknights have rights to plant and maintain trees in this easement area.

One thing to point out is once the visibility ratio of the home is less than 24.5% (when a home is officially deemed as "Visible"), neither the 18 ft height plane limit nor the need for an exception to the 28 ft low-to-high height limit would technically be necessary.

## CONCLUSION

We appreciate your time to review our application and look forward to receiving your support and approval. By following the Planning Commissioners' suggestion to add screening trees, we have determined that we will be able to reduce the visibility ratio to less than 24.5% in 2 years time or less (from time of planting). Along with making structural changes to reduce the overall height, we hope to have addressed all concerns highlighted during the July 28 meeting.

Sincerely,



Gary Kohlsaat, Architect C19245