

Beckstrom Architecture + Interiors

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May 23, 2020

TO: **Los Gatos Planning/Building Dept**

Project: 102 Alta Heights Court, Los Gatos, 95030; APN: 532-29-045, Zoning: R:1-8

Construct New 2-story Residence in R:1-8 Zone – Neighbor Communication Timeline

Background:

Our goal in designing this new Los Gatos home is to have open communication with the City and the neighborhood. Before we purchased the lot, we reached out to the City to ascertain the flexibility in zoning for this non-conforming lot, which is 35-50% smaller than the standard lot in this zone. We bought the property after learning the zoning conditions are flexible for a non-conforming lot. We reached out to the neighborhood to bring awareness to our plans to build a handsome, 2-story house within the legally allowed square footage. We had sensitivity to the existing large trees and close proximity to the neighbors.

8/29/2020

We went door to door to 8 neighbors to introduce ourselves and show them the house plans, which included an accurate 3D rendering of a BIM model, floorplans and a 3D model view of the street (see attached). Of the 8 neighbors, 6 were home and met with us. All 6 gave very positive feedback on the design and welcomed us to the neighborhood. All 6, including Ms. Shah and Mr. Eng, signed letters of support (see attached), which were sent to the City Planning Department. The only request we received at this time was from the Engs, who asked that we not have a second story window facing their upstairs bedroom 56' away.

Of the other 2 neighbors, 1 was not home and they currently have their house up for sale. The remaining 1 was very positive about the plans, but wanted to take time before signing a support letter.

Additionally, we gave our contact information and encouraged each neighbor to contact us with questions or concerns.

9/14/2020

We submitted the project to the Planning Department, essentially identical to what had been presented to the neighbors on 8/29. Very minor changes were made, which reduced the overall size of the house. The revised design has a lower roof by 1'-3", the garage moved back 3' for an 18' setback, the rear projection of the house was shortened, and the garage roof eave line was lowered by 3'. To satisfy the Eng's request, we redesigned the garage dormer - it was moved back and the dormer and windows were made smaller, so that the Redwood and Oak tree canopies would partially block the view to the Eng's home next door. This was a sacrifice for us, as the view from this room looks out to the lovely trees.

9/30/2020

Mr. Eng sent us a letter (see attached.) We addressed his concerns in the design (see above), and tried to connect with him via voicemail with no response.

11/9/2020

Ryan Safty forwarded a letter sent to the city by Mr. Eng (see attached.) We tried again to contact Mr. Eng, and left a voicemail and email, asking for a meeting to discuss his concerns. We had hoped to show him that we listened to his request and adjusted our plans to alleviate his concern for privacy. Mr. Eng never responded.

October 2020 - present

Eric moved his Architecture office into 102 Alta Heights and has worked there every day, communicating with neighbors regularly. Ms. Shah has been exceptionally friendly and interested in the project. At one point she even expressed interest in buying the house when completed. She and her husband had just built their house a couple years ago, so she had a lot of advice about the neighborhood and the permitting and building process. Ms. Shah indicated that their house approval had been controversial due to the unusually modern design. All indicators suggested she was very supportive of our project.

4/1/2021

The project story poles were installed.

4/2/2021

Ms. Shah approached Eric and asked for a copy of the house rendering, which Eric gave her. Ms. Shah also asked for the 3D CAD files. Eric offered to meet with her to show her on his computer at her convenience, which she declined.

4/8/2021

Mr. Eng wrote a very negative letter to us (see attached.)

4/12/2021

Ryan Safty forwarded a letter written to the city from Mr. Eng (see attached.)

4/20/2021

The story poles were certified.

Ryan Safty communicated to Eric that Ms. Shah had called numerous times with inquiries about the project.

Subsequently to these letters from both Ms. Shah and Mr. Eng, we reached out and scheduled meetings with them for 5/10 and 5/11 respectively.

5/11/2021-5/21/2021

We approached a few neighbors after the story poles were installed. 112 & 114 Alta Heights Ct verbally indicated they were supportive of the design.

5/10/2021

We met with Ms. Shah and Mr. Parihar at 102 Alta Heights for ~90 minutes. Their concerns as we understood were 1) They wanted us to lower the house height, and indicated they thought the ridge line of our house would be lower based on proposed plans, 2) They didn't want to look at our roof from any of their windows, and 3) They wanted us to push the entire house back on the lot. *Our responses were 1) The proposed house design is within the legal height limit, the story poles certify that the ridge is 1'-3" below the allowed height limit as shown on the plans. 2) Moving the house back on the lot would block Ms. Shah and Mr. Parihar's view of the mountains, as well moving the house back puts the large oak tree at risk, and 3) It is impossible to build a 2-story house on this lot without them seeing the roof from their windows.*

We walked our lot with them, and showed them the imposing view of their house from inside our house and backyard. We discussed our intention of trying to build an attractive house on a very small, irregular lot that would preserve the large oak tree and the neighbor's views. The house fits almost perfectly onto the existing house footprint. They did not seem to grasp any of the points, and seemed unwilling to compromise.

5/11/2021

We met with Mr and Mrs. Eng at 102 Ala Heights for over an hour. Their concerns were 1) They didn't want any garage dormer windows to face their house 2) They wanted us to move the house back on the lot to make our driveway longer, and 3) They wanted more distance between their garage and ours. *Our responses were 1) We made the 2nd story windows smaller and moved them so the redwood and oak trees would partially block the view, but we did not intend to entirely give up our view of the lovely trees from the 2nd story. Their window of concern is approx. 56' away from our proposed dormer. 2) Moving the house back on the lot would threaten the health of the large oak tree and actually push the house more in the view of both 161 Loma Alta and 104 Alta Heights Ct. The proposed driveway is 18' long, and we are doubling the parking for this lot, from 2 spaces to 4.*

3) Their garage extends over 18' from his rear yard setback, which is what causes the proximity to our proposed garage. Our lot is narrow, and it is extremely challenging to design a narrow house with the required 2 car garage. The new garage is in the same location as the current garage. They also did not seem to grasp any of the points, and seemed unwilling to compromise.

5/21/2021

Ryan Safty forwarded letters submitted to the city from both Mr. Eng and Ms. Shah (see attached.) These letters continue to bring up the same issues we discussed with them at our meetings. We are frustrated, as there appears to be no way to appease these people, short of scrapping the project altogether.

Conclusion:

Both neighbors, at 104 Alta Heights Ct and 175 Loma Alta seemed to demand that we redesign our house exactly as they wished without compromise. We tried to explain that their requests were in fact, impossible to achieve. We were quite taken aback as we had made ourselves available for discussion for months, and neither neighbor seemed willing to talk until now, in the 11th hour. We are simply desiring to build a handsome house within our legal limits, with sensitivity to the neighbors and existing trees - a house design which will aesthetically fit in with the Loma Alta neighborhood, sits on the footprint of the existing house and will improve property values for all.

It is absurd that Mr. Parihar and Ms. Shah, who have the most radical, modern, boxy house in the neighborhood, say that our design is not compatible with the neighborhood. In addition to dominating the cul de sac aesthetically, their house also has a very imposing 2-story blank façade overlooking our house and backyard.

It is also bewildering that Mr. and Mrs Eng have a house which grossly defies 3 setbacks and dominates the cul de sac with a 56' long, 2-story tall, brown stucco wall (3x longer than our entry wall). It is also the house with the smallest 4.75' driveway, providing no room for parked cars.

Both neighbors seem entitled to have houses which flagrantly overstep setbacks and neighborhood aesthetics, yet they seem to refuse to support a new neighbor in building a house that is compatible with the neighborhood and is within the legal parameters of the substandard lot. The Loma Alta neighborhood is a historic village setting, with small lots, many tall 2-story houses built before setbacks and a density 2.25 times more than other R:1-8 zones.

Sincerely,



Eric A. Beckstrom
Architect/Owner



Catherine DuBridge
Designer/Owner

City of Los Gatos
Planning Office
110 East Main Street
Los Gatos, CA 95030

Dear Planning,

We are writing on behalf of plans for a new home to be built at 102 Alta Heights Court.

We are neighbors, living at ~~102 Alta Heights Ct~~ 112 Alta Heights Ct

We have reviewed the proposed design of the new home and support the plans. It fits in well with the surrounding homes in its character and scale, and we feel it will help improve the quality of the overall neighborhood.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. J. L.', written over a horizontal line.

8/31/20


City of Los Gatos
Planning Office
110 East Main Street
Los Gatos, CA 95030

Dear Planning,

We are writing on behalf of plans for a new home to be built at 102 Alta Heights Court.
We are neighbors, living at 116 Alta Heights Ct.

We have reviewed the proposed design of the new home and support the plans. It fits in well with the surrounding homes in its character and scale, and we feel it will help improve the quality of the overall neighborhood.

Sincerely,



Eric Beckstrom

From: Ron E <175.ron@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, August 30, 2020 8:50 PM
To: Catherine DuBridge; Eric beckstrom
Subject: 102 Alta Heights Ct - Eng letter
Attachments: Eng Planning Letter.doc; 2020-09-01_letter to beckstrom.doc

Hello Catherine and Eric

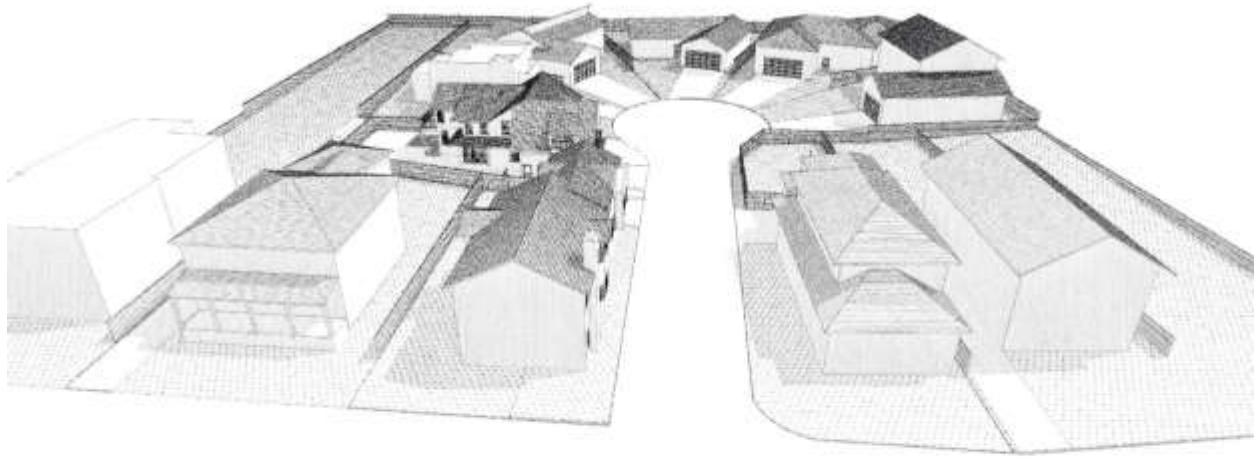
Attached are letters we prepared in response to our meeting over the weekend.

One letter is for the Town Planning Department and the other letter reflects comments we have about the renderings you shared with us.

Feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Regards

Ron Eng



Eric Beckstrom

From: Ron E <175.ron@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 8, 2021 3:24 PM
To: Catherine DuBridge
Cc: eric@beckstromarchitecture.com
Subject: Re:

At our initial meeting we expressed concerns about having windows facing our bedroom and deck. Your plans show total disregard for our early apprehensions about our privacy concerns . Unfortunately I imprudently wrote a hasty letter approving the renderings without seeing actual floor plans.

Given your initial duplicitous behavior, I am skeptical that you people are serious about willing to negotiate aspects of your plans.

If you are serious about compromise, you can show a sign of good faith by removing the side window or changing the side window to a clear story window.

Otherwise I will continue to direct my concerns through the Town Planning Department.

Regards
Ron

On Thu, Apr 8, 2021 at 11:32 AM Catherine DuBridge <catherinedubridge@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Ron

We see that a second letter was written to the city regarding our proposed home. We are very interested in discussing any questions and concerns. We are available this evening or tomorrow evening to get together. Let us know if either time works for you.

Respectfully,

Catherine and Eric

Beckstrom Architecture + Interiors

650-847-8351

www.BeckstromArchitecture.com

Ron and Linda Eng
175 Loma Alta Avenue
Los Gatos, CA 95030

September 30, 2020

Re 102 Alta Heights Court

Hello Eric and Catherine

Thank you for sharing your architectural renderings with the neighborhood. We've all been looking forward to meeting our new neighbor and anxious to get a glimpse of the new house you are proposing in the cul-de-sac.

Since we are an adjoining neighbor we will be directly impacted by the new house, so we have some concerns and comments we want to share with you. As mentioned in our letter to the Town Planning Department, we have no objection the architectural style of the house, but here is a list of our comments for your review and consideration.

1. We ask that any windows in the bonus room that face us be designed as a clerestory window wherein the glazing be installed above the line of sight so as not to compromise the privacy of our second level room and deck. Or install a skylight in-lieu of windows.
2. I understand that the side setback is 5 feet but from our backyard, the 30 feet height will be massive and create a canyon affect in our backyard. Designing the southerly face to step back would temper the massiveness of the side of the new house and allow more sunlight into our yard.
3. The 30 feet height will block our northerly view and sunlight. Trimming back the oak tree branches that overhang into our property will permit more sunlight and lessen impact of the height of the new house. Reducing the pitch of the roof, will also lower the 30 feet height.
4. There are couple items to consider along the side of our garage.
 - a. Note that the property line between us lies 3 feet north of the side of garage. We are agreeable to leaving this area open to "light landscaping" without any fencing.
 - b. The rendering exhibiting the front of the proposed house indicates a tree along the side of the garage. We are opposed to any trees along the side of garage. It has been our experience that trees planted in this narrow space will grow roots that will compromise the integrity of the garage foundation and will undermine the adjacent driveway.

Please give our comments some consideration as you move forward with your project and contact us any time to clarify or discuss any of the above matters.

Thank you for this opportunity to dialogue with you about your future plans as you move forward.

Regards,
Ron Eng