METRO
DESIGN
GROUP

May 22, 2019

Supplemental Response to Town of Los Gatos' Consulting Architect's letter dated March 29, 2019

15925 Quail Hill Drive
Architecture and Site Application S-19-012

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The following is a response to Comment #5 from a May 8th 2019 Staff Technical Review Letter requesting a Justification Letter that addresses staff's concerns about the project's compliance with the *Hillside Development Guidelines & Standards* as described in the Issues and Concerns section of that report.

Beginning on page 3 of the report, Mr. Cannon indicates that the "proposed house has an identifiable style with authentic details executed in high quality materials". Furthermore, Mr. Cannon states that the site will have "substantial landscaping proposed to buffer views of the house"; and "from a pure architectural design standpoint, it would be difficult to fault the proposed design".

On Page 4 of the report, Mr. Cannon states that there are "some specific elements of the Hillside Development Standards & Guidelines which may not be adequately met by this design". The following dialogue is an explanation of how the project has been designed to address each of the specific elements of concern:

E. Objectives of the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines.
The following objectives are intended to implement the Town of Los Gatos vision statement for its hillside and to ensure that all development is in compliance with the goals, policies and implementing strategies of the General Plan.
4. Maintain the natural appearance if the hillsides from all vantage points including the valley floor.

To the greatest extent reasonably possible, any and all earth movement operations of the site has been limited to the excavation for the proposed building footprint and a driveway to access the sites required parking areas. This project proposed no site retaining walls beyond the building or driveway area with exception of a patio and walkway from the guest parking area up to the residence. The majority of this site and the proposed building will not be seen from the valley floor, including any of the Town's designated viewing platforms.

The Owner and Architect both acknowledge that it is important to not alter the site by creating a large building pad derived from retaining walls. The Owner's objective is to have a home with an "architectural style that is typically constructed on a flat building pad". The site does contain a level building pad where an existing home is located. Whereas this location is clearly the most desirable for the owners and would score high on the constraints analysis, it also adversely impacts the surrounding neighbors and would not meet the objectives of the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines.

The owners clearly understand the importance of maintaining the serene beauty of the hillsides and have sacrificed having an amazing view by instead locating their home on the lower portion of the lot having a slope that provides many advantages in protecting the hillside. The two, very visible residences that currently occupy the site will be removed and a new residence located close to the corner of Drysdale Drive and Shady Lane will be constructed. This new location will have ample visual mitigation for the street and create open space along the ridge line above the property.

The site will not be altered in any unnatural way. The driveway cuts across the site parallel to the site's natural contours in order to limit grading quantities. The cut slope will be modulated and shaped with rounded contours in order to emulate the natural hillside that exists today.

9. Ensure that the development does not dominate, but rather visually blends and achieves harmony between the natural and built environment.

Inasmuch as a large portion of the bulk and mass of this building is below grade and the building forms have been further redesigned to step in cadence with the slope of the site, ensures that this development will visually blend and harmonize with natural environment. Furthermore, many new trees have been positioned to provide a soft transition between the new development and the surrounding environment.

Story poles, erected on site cannot be viewed from any of the Town's designated viewing platforms, specifically the closes site located at the corner of Blossom Hill Rd. and Los Gatos Blvd.

Again, whereas there are two existing homes that dominate the site from the ridgeline will be removed, this project proposes the removal of these existing structures and returning the hillside to its original state.

V. Architectural Design
A. Design objectives
The standards and guidelines in this section are intended to encourage architectural design that is:
1.) In harmony and visually blends with the natural environment
3.) Compatible with the surrounding neighborhood and respectful of neighbors, and
4.) Respectful of the rural character of the hillsides.

It is the job of this architect to balance the owner's objectives and goals within the limitations of the zoning code as well as the HDS&G. The project has responded to the site constraints and taken advantage if the opportunities that are present in order to create a design that harmonizes with the surrounding natural environment and is respectful of the neighbor's views and privacy. The plans have been shared with the adjoining neighbors and no immediate concerns appear to be present.

It has been over 15 years since the HDS&G document was completed and subsequently several homes have been developed in the surrounding area and specifically along Shady Lane. The bucolic, rural character that once dominated the hillsides of Los Gatos has progressed to allow other architectural styles of higher quality.

The proposed residence, driveway and patio areas contains an average footprint that along with minimal site development and the removal of the existing homes and hardscape will result in 82% of the site as being undeveloped and in a natural state.

E. Building Height

Standards:
1.) The maximum height for homes in hillside areas shall be 25 feet. Building height shall be measured in compliance with provisions of the Town's Zoning Ordinance.
2.) The maximum height of a building's tallest elevation shall not exceed 25 feet measured from the lowest part of the building to the highest part, except building s above a ridgeline or that are visible from a viewing platform where the maximum height from the lowest to the highest points shall not exceed 28 feet.

Excessive building height adversely impacts and alters a building's ability to blend into the natural hillsides. Without an overall (lowest to highest) height limitation, a building could maintain a modest height above the natural grade but continue to sprawl vertically upon the site giving a visual impression from afar as being an excessively tall building. Additionally, limiting a building's overall height can reduce the footprint area of a building and encourages a building design that is parallel to the site's topographic contours.

The height limit for this residence is 25 feet high above natural grade with an overall height limit of 35 feet from highest to lowest point. Story Poles were set up on the site to emulate the outline of the highest roof lines that surround the building. From the closest viewing platform located at Los Gatos Road and Blossom Hill Road, a camera using a 300mm telephoto lens was not able to capture a view of any story poles. The photo below is taken from Drysdale Drive showing the story poles in place and has been enhanced to illustrate the overall building massing.

(Fig. A)

This site's narrow building area runs perpendicular to the relatively steep topographic contours and greatly constrains the ability to construct a floor area that meet's the owner's programmatic goals and objectives. The proposed building technically may not meet the overall height limit of 35' but was thoughtfully designed to comply with the intent of this standard. The garage doors are in effect imperceptible and do not in any way create a visual impact. Whether the garage entrance is removed or remains as currently designed will not change the visible character of the building.

The proposed residence has several floor levels that step in cadence with the slope of the site in order to maintain harmony with the site's natural contours. Although a portion off the site will be graded along the east and west sides of the building (up to the maximum limit of 4 feet), the natural appearance of the hillside will not be perceptibly altered. The purpose for this localized site grading is to lower the overall height of the retaining walls at the light wells.
A unique design technique of obscuring the location of the garage doors provides exceptional mitigation by rendering the garage as an extraneous element.

By meandering the retaining walls along the driveway up to the Garage entrance it obscuring any view of the garage door opening. Additionally the garage opening is surrounded by landscape above and on each side to framing it as a landscape element rather than an element of the main residence.

F. Minimize building bulk and mass

One of the primary concerns of Los Gatos residents is that some new houses in the hillsides appear overly large and bulky, resulting in high visibility from surrounding properties and the valley floor. The design standards and guidelines in this section address this issue.

Standards:

1.) Buildings shall be designed to minimize bulk, mass and volume so as not to be prominently visible from a distance or from surrounding properties.

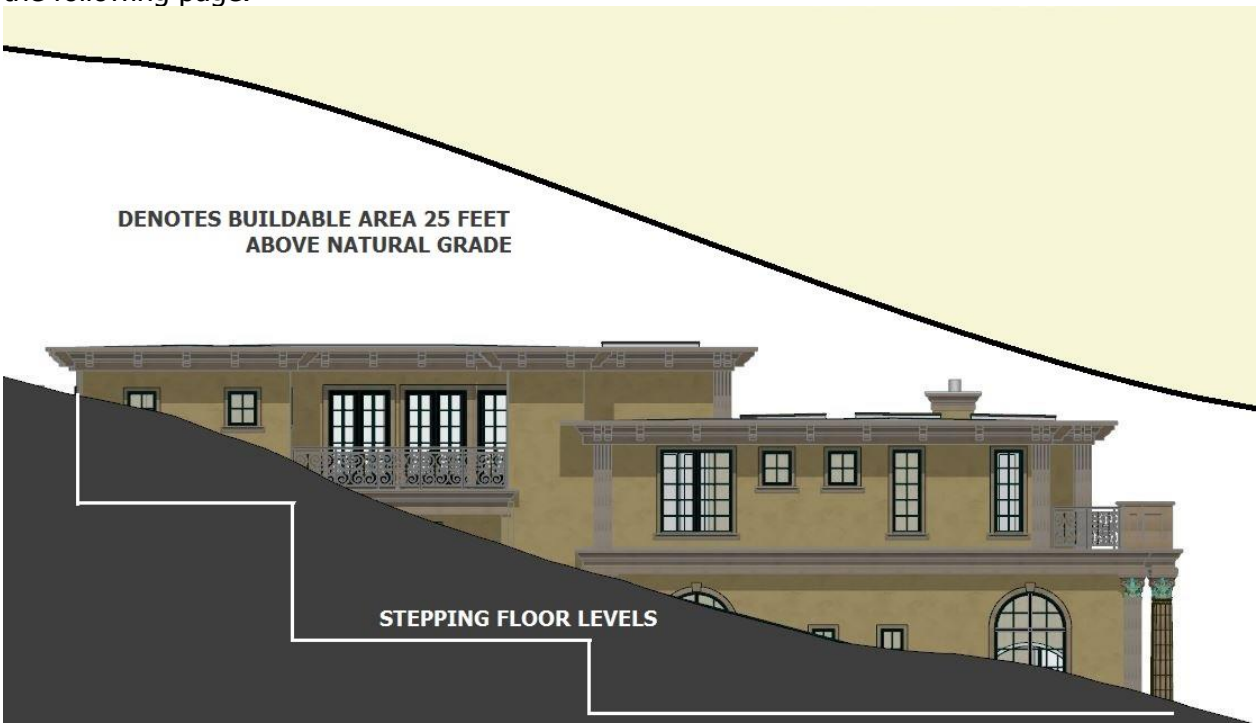
It is important to understand the stated objectives for each of these standards within the HDS&G vision statement. The hillsides are a valuable resource that is visible from anywhere in town. The open, wooded rural character of the hills must be retained for future generations to enjoy.

Due to the slope of site and the narrow lot width, a large portion of residence is located partially or wholly below the grade. As viewed from above the site, the visible walls that facing uphill area less than 5 feet above the surrounding natural grade. The principal façade facing downhill is 17 feet above the adjacent grade. The building massing steps uphill while providing an interior volumes that meets the owner's objectives and goals. The massing is also broken up into simple segments that reduce the overall appearance of mass and bulk. New trees will be strategically planted to mitigate any and all visual impacts that the new building might otherwise create.

2.) Buildings shall be designed to conform to the natural topography of the site and run with the contours. Blending with the existing terrain reduces the appearance of bulk.

In harmony with the sloping site, the several floor levels were designed to step in cadence with natural terrain. The sites narrow width leaves less than 64 feet of width to construct the residence running parallel to the contours. The building's massing is therefore condensed side to side and requires constructing into the hillside with stepped floor levels as illustrated in (Fig.

B) below. This is similar to other approved buildings such as the residence shown in (fig C1) on the following page.



(Fig. B)

Guidelines:
1.) The Building Design should incorporate but not be limited to, the following techniques to efficiently reduce the appearance of mass, bulk and volume:
b.) Avoid architectural styles that are inherently viewed as massive and bulky

I recognized early on in the design process that the owner's desire for a classical building style, normally constructed on generous flat properties, was going to be a challenge on this sloping site. I was prompted to visit a few buildings also on Shady Lane that were recently completed and with the HDG&S being enforced. Below are just a few samples of these buildings which all deploy high quality classical elements within the architecture. In Particular is the building shown in Fig. C1 that similarly steps up the hill with several floor levels and due to site conditions cannot run its massing parallel to the site's contours.

Fig. C1

The building below utilizes high quality building methods and materials, to break up the massing. The vertical façade looms close to the roadway and utilizes landscape to soften the visual impact.

(Fig. C2)

d.) Minimize volume; avoid large volume buildings.

The owner's request for a capacious entryway is mitigated by surrounding this space on each side with conventional, two-story massing containing bedrooms. On the downhill facing façade, the entryway is mitigated by receding the upper floor level back such that the lower floor level stands out and equal in height with the flanking architectural massing. This lower level massing runs parallel with the topographic contours and is horizontal in proportion.

G. Roofs:

Standards:

1.) Roof forms and roof lines shall be broken into smaller building components to reflect the irregular forms of surrounding natural features.

The residence has been designed to meet the owner's object of a classic Beaux Arts style residence with a flat roof. This style of building is normally characterized as rectilinear and boxy. Conversely, the proposed residence has been redesigned such that it successfully modulates the building's massing into several individual elements; articulating each floor level with horizontal moldings. The roof forms have large cornices that project outward and cast shadow across the wall plane. Additionally the plan modulates inward to also break up the

massing and roof areas. The result of these design elements is a building that appears to step vertically in cadence with the hillsides topography as illustrated in (Fig. B)

2.) The slope of the main roof shall generally be oriented in the same direction as the natural slope of the terrain.

Whereas the style of the building dictates the use of a flat roof rather than a roof line that is pitched at an angle, the flat roof lines step in cadence to follow the angle of the site's slope. As viewed from the roadways a sloping roof could add additional bulk and would likely not be perceivable anyway. This concept can be seen in (Fig C2)

H. Architectural Elements:

Guidelines

1.) The use of large windows and glass doors should be kept to a minimum to reduce the daytime glare and nighttime lighting emanating from large glazed areas and to increase heating and cooling efficiency. Of particular concern is the glare that impacts neighboring properties and is visible from the valley floor.

Whereas the style of the home generally necessitates larger windows and French doors, the amounts of glass and the orientation of the building will never cause a glare that will impact the neighboring properties or the valley floor. The building is at an elevation that cannot be seen from the valley floor. The locations of existing and new trees being planted in relation to the location of the surrounding neighbor's homes assure a generous amount of privacy. The windows on the upper floor level will be modest is size and not mulled together to form a large single glazed opening.

2.) The use of architectural features that increase visual prominence should be avoided. Massive, tall elements such as two-story entries, turrets, and large fireplaces should be avoided. Such elements on the downhill façade of the house are of particular concern.

Whereas the style of a classical home traditionally has a large entry door, the Entry for this residence has been subsequently re-designed to be subdued and concealed in shade behind a projecting porch element. This building does not feature any tall elements that dominate any of the building's facades as it did prior to redesigning the building to incorporate the consulting Architect's recommendations. The Living Room fireplace is integrated into an exterior wall of the residence and only rises above the roof to the minimum distance required for the building code.

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