



November 21, 2019

## **Justification Letter**

15925 Quail Hill Drive  
Architecture and Site Application S-19-012  
Project Planner: Jennifer Armer

Subject: A new residence to be constructed at 15925 Quail Hill Drive  
Architecture and Site Application S-19-012

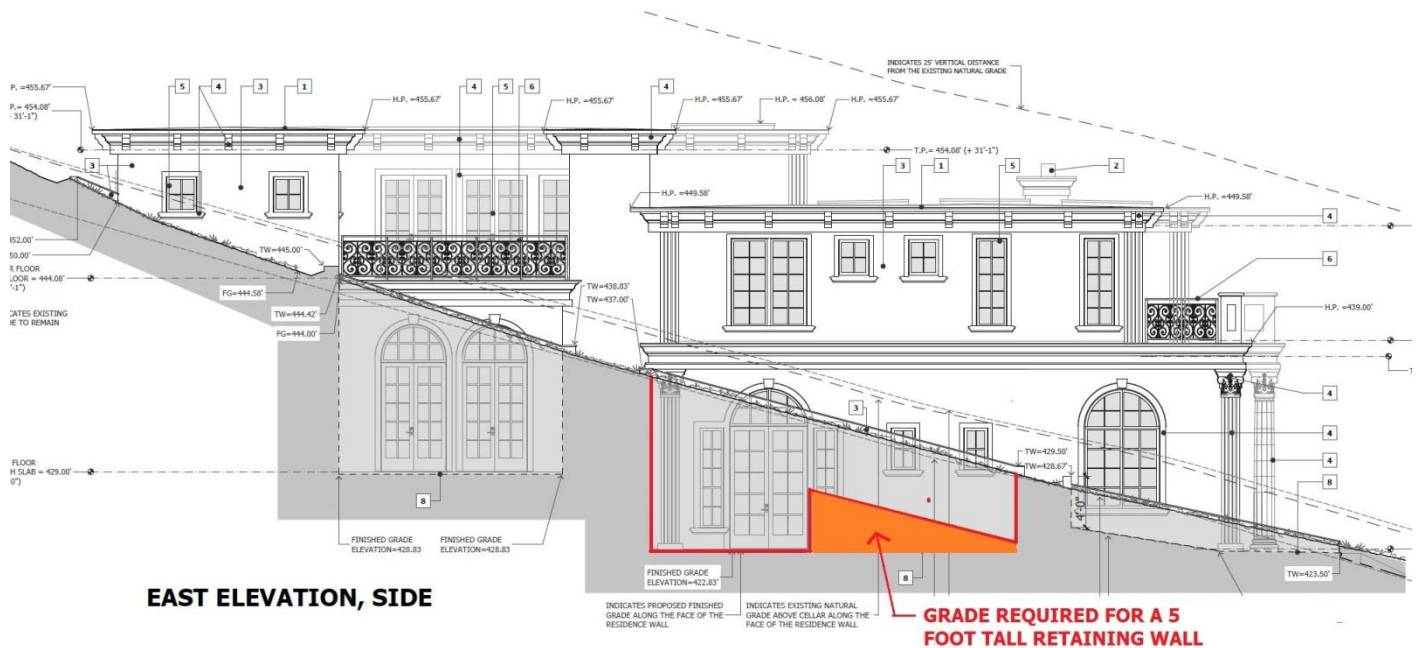
This letter will address Staff's contention that the Subject application "exceeds the maximum cut, fill and retaining wall heights". This project is requesting exceptions to the Hillside Design Standards and Guidelines for 4 light wells, a portion of retaining walls along the driveway and the overall height limit.

The primary reason for creating the Hillside Design Standards and Guidelines was because a "design by numbers" approach does not always yield a mutually beneficial outcome for the property owners and the citizens of the town. The design process for this project has undergone more than a dozen different iterations to ensure that the objectives and goals of the HDS&G document are achieved. Whereas the site is exceptionally narrow relative to its length, orienting the residence parallel to the topographic contours is impracticable.

### **LIGHTWELLS**

The primary objective for limiting the height of retaining walls and grading to a maximum of 4 feet of cut is to "insure that new development fits into the topography with minimum impacts to the site both physically and visually".

The Town Code's don't have a specific definition of a lightwell and does not include any specific limitations on the size or location of the retaining walls that form a lightwell except to require a minimum width of 3 feet. Nor does the Town Code's limit the height of a retaining wall when integrated as a component of a light well. Staff's concern regarding to the proposed lightwells seems to be founded in the equivocal assumption that a lightwell may ONLY be constructed adjacent to "below grade floor area". When constructing a lightwell on a sloping grade, a portion of this project's lightwells by definition, change from being defined as a light well and instead become a retaining wall. It is this area of the lightwell that is technically out of compliance with the HDS&G. Whereas this minor infraction could be remedied by raising the grade inside the light well to create a wall height of less than 5 feet, since the walls inside the lightwell are not visible, this modification would create no visible improvement to the project.



## ALTERNATE GRADE INSIDE RETAINING WALL

The lightwell walls are completely indiscernible from the surrounding areas. Obviously, raising the grade up within the lightwell to lessen the retaining wall height will not alter any visual effects on the surrounding hillside.

The project uses its below grade floor area as a means of providing "hidden" square footage in lieu of visible mass as permitted by Sec 29.40.072 of the Municipal Code.

### SITE RETAINING WALLS AND HEIGHT LIMIT

The retaining walls that flank the driveway up to the Garage are less than feet tall until they reach the garage doors where the walls slope with the existing grade up to 8 feet tall. The retaining walls area required to hold back the earth and enter through the garage opening and do not alter any grade beyond the driveway itself. Solutions that positioned the Garage above grade required large areas of driveway from which to back out of the garage safely. On the hillside the backup areas required excessive retaining walls and grading quantities, creating greater visual impacts that we difficult to mitigate.

The current design incorporates a significant landscaped planter area situated above the garage opening and designed to integrate with the surrounding natural grade. The overall affect visually disconnects the below grade driveway, retaining walls and garage wall from the main house. Additionally, the bending driveway configuration blocks any view of the below grade garage door opening. The net result insures that the development fits into the topography with minimal impact to the site visually and physically.

Whereas the finished grade of the driveway elevation at the garage door opening may technically exceed the HDG&S standard of a 35 foot overall height limit. This fact poses no visual impact and the proposed residence otherwise meets the max 25 feet allowable height limit.