KOHLSAAT & ASSOCIATES
ARCHITECTURE

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

July 30, 2024

Re: The Agahian Residence, 45 Reservoir Road, Los Gatos
Project Description/ Letter of Justification (ver 2.0)
Updated 11.26.24

To Whom it May Concern:

On behalf of the property owner Ms. Farnaz Agahian, I am pleased to present this project for an Architecture and Site application. The proposed project includes the construction of a new two-story residence with an attached two car garage, as well as an attached accessory dwelling unit (ADU). The letter, accompanies the building plans and supplemental exhibits, contains descriptions of the property, the neighborhood. It also describes how the proposed development complies with the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines.

DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING PROPERTY

Access
The property is located along a private access road of Reservoir Drive, connecting both the public portion of Reservoir Drive and Roger Street with access gates on both ends. This private road serves a total of 5 properties including the subject property. The 10,000sf vacant lot was sub-divided via a lot merger application back in 2015 (from 60 Rogers Street) and was zoned R-1-20. The property borders a group of R-1-10 lots on the eastern side and a group of R-1D lots on the northern side. An easement was established along Reservoir Drive for ingress/ egress, with utility easements (gas and sanitary sewer) going back to 60 Rogers Street.

Topography
This site has a north facing slope that averages at 28%, with the least restrictive development areas (LRDA) mainly on the access road and a few small graded areas throughout. A series of mature oak trees cover the rear, eastern and western property lines. Remnants of old stone steps and retaining walls can be seen where the new perimeter wood fence is erected. An asphalt paved access road cuts thru the property and a relatively steep cut bank can be seen downhill from the road (likely from the creation of the road). Overall, apart from being visible to the immediately adjacent neighbors, the property is relatively private and isolated.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED RESIDENCE

Early Development and Challenges:
With the lot sized at 83ft wide by 126ft long, this 10,000sf lot was zoned R-1-20 with associated setbacks: side setback is 15ft, the rear setback is 25ft and the front setback is 30ft. In addition, the majority of the LRDA area is over the access road, which cuts through and takes up 1/3 of the building envelope, leaving the rest of the building envelope very limited and at a slope over 30%.

An early application back in 2018 was submitted by a different owner for a 2,400sf, 2.5-story home with a basement. A couple issues were brought up during the development review regarding the massing of the building, high hillside visibility and the large amount of retaining wall and road expansion work to accommodate a fire-truck turnaround.

The hillside overlay design standards further restricted the building envelope with their 18ft /28ft height limits, allowable floor area (FAR), fire access, among other hillside challenges.

Final Design and Solutions:
The top priorities for the final design are working with the existing road, fitting the program efficiently in the tight building envelope, balancing the building mass and reducing the hillside visibility. A couple strategies were applied included using a tandem garage to limit facade massing, going with a reverse floor plan (with bedrooms on the lower floor and main living spaces on the upper floor) to make best use of the limited windows/views, and limiting the building to a two-story design with a stepped facade/shape following the road and the topography contour. In working with a steep topography, a sizable amount of the lower floor (70%) is located below grade to reduce visible bulk and mass.

Even with all these methods, development exceptions to build outside of the LRDA as well as going into the side and rear setbacks are still unavoidable to make the design work. We will explain more in detail below.

Floor Plan Arrangement and Connectivity
The house features a reversed floor plan with a tandem garage and 2 bedroom suites on the lower floor. The main living spaces (kitchen, living and dining rooms) are on the main floor, where a 530sf attached accessory dwelling unit (ADU) is also located with separate living amenities and entrance through the side yard. A covered porch (loggia) is located on the main floor to provide outdoor living space and exterior definition as the hillside terrain doesn't always allow for conventional, widespread patios.

Surrounding the residence is a series of of walkways and steps for circulation. Using tiered grading and retaining walls, a modest yard space was carved out at the back yard, as well as a narrow walkway around the back of the house. A series of access stairs is located on the east side and a light well on the west side of the house. Together they allow for egress, air and light access, and being able to walk around the house. This 2-story house is connected on the inside via a stairway as well as an elevator, with access on each level that leads to the outside space.

Exterior Styling
Proposed residence is of a simple Mediterranean styling with subdued terra cotta colors to blend in with the natural hillside environment. Low-sloped, hipped roofs with flat roof tiles cover

over the house and a flat roof covers the loggia. Walls have two-tone stucco finish and dark-color gridded windows and doors. Stepped building forms, plus solid and open volumes are used to break up the massing. A sizable portion of the building is buried into the hillside as much as practical to diminish the two-story appearance. Lastly the building facade is adorned with subtle architectural elements to add interest to the styling.

There is a mixture of eclectically styled, one and two-story homes, with floor areas ranging from 1,500sf to 3,500sf within the neighborhood. We expect the proposed residence to be compatible to the neighborhood, both architecturally and in size.

Private Road Fire Access and Plans For Downhill Area:

Despite the Reservoir private road being a through path that connects Rogers Street and Reservoir Road, the hair-pin turn in front of 36 Rogers Street makes the road impossible for a fire truck to drive up and thru, rendering our project site a dead-end site. We've been working with the Fire Department on an AMMR (Alternative Materials, Methods of Construction, or Modification of Code) and after evaluating multiple options, we have to go with a fire truck turn-around area in order to allow the emergency vehicles to come on site, while permit the local ingress/egress traffic on the private road. A modified turnaround area of roughly 40ft by 45-50ft has been added in front of the garage, set at the same level as the road.

The construction of the turn-around area will no doubt be challenging: with substantial grading and tall retaining walls that require grading exceptions. However it is necessary to do this to prioritize the fire safety of our residents and the neighborhood. In addition, careful considerations are made to address the visibility of the retaining walls, drainage and to provide landscape screening to our neighbors.

* See further explanation below for grading and retaining wall exceptions.

Fire Water Supply:
A number of hydrants are available within reach of the subject property, with the closest one located on Reservoir Road (in front of 39 Reservoir Rd) with a total travel distance of 483ft from the farthest corner of the house to the hydrant. The new residence will be equipped with fire sprinkler protection system as well, among other fire protection measures.

Visibility:
With visibility dictating our allowable building heights, it is a high priority in our design. To evaluate its impact to our design, we set up temporary, partial story-poles of the proposed building shape and superimposed simulations of the proposed residence to conduct studies from the town's designated viewing areas. Compare with 6 years ago when the last application was filed, many of the same screening trees have grown and are providing excellent screening for the proposed residence. Further, a shorter and slightly wider re-design allows us to take better advantage of the screening trees. The result is a very encouraging reduction of the visibility percentage: from 62% down to 22% of the front elevation. Among the visible portions are the loggia and a small section of the powder room. The main house portion is setback by a good amount, or is shielded by the screening trees. This percentage categorizes the house as a non-visible home with an allowable height of 28ft. The proposed new building design is mostly below the 18ft height plane (see sections and elevations).

Neighbor Outreach:
With this property been years in development, many of the neighbors (long-term and those who recently moved in) are aware of the development and have been in touch with the owner. It gave us a chance to review the project with them, listen and take in their concerns and feedbacks. Ranging from road expansion, privacy and utility issues. This is, however, an on-going activity and we will continue to do so as we progress in our application with the town. We have included a separate list documenting our correspondence with our neighbors.

EXCEPTION REQUESTS AND JUSTIFICATIONS

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

EXCEPTION TO TOWN CODE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Parking configuration and stall size: due to the existing road elevation, the garage works best being on the east side of the property. However even with a reduced rear setback having (2) 20ft long parking spaces will push the garage facade really close to the road and on-coming traffic. We are requesting an exemption to reduce the second parking space from 20ft long down to 18ft long. A 18ft long parking space is still a very practical size and it can potentially avoid a bottleneck between the garage and the road.

2. Setback Encroachment: (refer to architectural site plan on A1)
   - This 10,000sf vacant lot was subdivided from a much bigger lot zoned R-1-20 and was given the same zoning designation with the associated setbacks. However the actual lot size, widths and lengths are in fact more similar and compatible with its bordering properties that are zoned with R-1D and R-1-10 zones. Having to follow the R-1-20 setbacks, compounded with the reduction of the building envelope due to the pre-existing road location, undoubtedly would have forced the design into a 3-story home (as seen in past application design). It would have exceeded both the 18ft and 28ft height limits and adversely increased the hillside visibility percentage by a great amount, making it a very visible home.

   - Our alternative is to propose a small amount of encroachment into the standard side and rear setbacks. This allows us to keep to a 2-story design. Stretching the building wider rather than taller also makes better use of the existing screening trees. An exception is hereby requested to allow partial encroachment into the rear and side setbacks.

EXCEPTIONS TO HILLSIDE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES
1. Retaining wall height exception at the fire truck turn-around: (refer to architectural site plan on A4 and civil sheet C4)

- The required turn-around space, with even a modified footprint, requires an area of roughly 40ft by 50ft and a slope of no more than 5%. It needs to be on the same level as the existing road and expands towards the downhill area. Retaining walls that are needed to create this pad will vary between 5ft to 15.5ft high. They can be constructed out of soldier pile and wood lagging, which has a natural rustic appearance that is commonly seen in the hillside area. It also allows for natural drainage and avoids the need of complex drainage lines that is normally required for concrete wall construction.

- In addition of the retaining wall appearance, 4ft of landscape buffer zones are planned around the turn-around area to screen the walls from neighbors.

2. Grading (Fill) exception along the outer edge of the widened road: (refer to architectural site plan on A4 and civil sheet C4)

- Fill areas of up to 15.5 ft is necessary for the construction of the turn-around area. While this is a significant height and will require an exception, it can significant offset and amount of soil off-haul created by the house grading.

3. Structure outside of the least restrictive development area: (refer to sheet A3 and A4) this property used to be the yard space of 60 Rogers Street, so the only LRDA were created for the private road, as well as a few small, graded areas for the remnant landscape steps. The rest of the property, including the building envelope remains an ungraded, steep hill. There is not enough LRDA on this property that will allow the construction of a new residence. Hence we are hoping to apply for exception to this requirement.

EXCEPTIONS TO HILLSIDE SPECIFIC PLAN

1. Guest parking spaces at Hillside Specific Plan: the size and configuration of the lot has made it challenging to provide all the hillside specific street parking, and we want to prioritize getting ingress/egress and fire truck access while being sensitive with grading and road expansion. So instead of the 4 required spaces we are requesting to reduce it to 1 parking space.

EXCEPTIONS TO TOWN CODE:

SEC 29.10.155(c)(2) Driveway/ access road must be a minimum of 18 feet in width for the <u>full</u> length to Reservoir Road:

1. The creation of the access road granted a 12 ft easement for ingress and egress purposes across the 5 neighboring properties. While our property owner can make improvements on her property, she has no control over her neighbors' portion of the road.
2. We have to prioritize spaces for fire access and maneuvering, off street parking, tree preservation and visibility screening, all along a very limited road frontage. We have widened about 60% of our road, including the choke point at the 2 brick pillars, to get at least a 12 ft wide road as well as a space for a fire truck turn-around. The rest of the road is widened as much as possible to accommodate some parking, while leaving us about 15'-9" of egress width, some space for tree preservation and drainage management.
3. The current road varies from 12 to 24 ft in width and has separate, widened parking and maneuvering space in front of each property it serves, providing turn-out spaces that have worked well with these residences for years.

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:

III Site Planning:

- All the site constraints have been carefully analyzed in planning the building position, size and configuration.
- An infill project within a developed neighborhood to minimize substantial impacts to public services.
- New building pad elevation was chosen to work with the existing road slope and and elevations to minimize impacts to neighbors. Road expansion work was kept to a reasonable extent with minimal amount of grading and retaining wall.
- Trees downhill from road are preserved to maintain visibility screening. New trees are proposed to screen retaining wall from neighbors.
- Grading locations and quantities were carefully applied to minimize extents and impacts.
- Permanent retaining walls for house and yard were kept to 5ft or less, and in discreet locations to minimize visibility and grading needs.

V Development Intensity and Architectural Design:

- Proposed house size and a two-story configuration are compatible to the neighboring homes.
- The proposed contemporary mediterranean style blends in well with natural hillside setting and among the wide-ranging home styles of the neighborhood.
- Minimized number and size of windows facing neighbors. Positioned deck and outdoor spaces away from neighbors.
- Used simple forms, low, hipped rooflines, as well as varying wall planes to break up elevation and massing into smaller units.
- All exterior materials are natural to blend in with the environment, meet WUI classification for fire resistance and to have a light reflective value (LRV) or less than 30.

Privacy:

- With the proposed residence set into the hill, the majority of the windows are directed downhill and away from the nearby neighbors.
- The outdoor gathering areas such as Loggia and yard are located on the private side of the residence, away from the adjacent neighbors.
- New trees are proposed on the downhill size of the lot to increase privacy screening.

VI. SITE ELEMENTS

The use of retaining walls: (refer to architectural site plan on A1 and civil sheet C4)

- To limit and amount of grading and avoid creating large flat areas, the rear yard used permanent retaining walls to create a tier configuration of landscaped area, a small yard and a walkway around the back of the house.
- Retaining walls are used to create egress light well for the lower floor bedroom, as well as egress stair on the side of the house.
- Retaining walls at rear yard are split up to minimize wall mass and height.

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 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 exception requests for the creation of a fire truck turn-around, we hope to achieve the owner' goals, makes the best use of the property, while respecting the neighborhood and its natural environment. We believe this will be a high-quality addition to this neighborhood. We appreciate your time to review our application and hope to get your support and approval.

Sincerely,

Gary Kohlsaat
Architect C19245

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