



Item No: 1
Meeting Date: June 10, 2014

To: Planning Commission

Date: June 5, 2014

Authorized By: Ron Munekawa
Chief of Planning

By: Christy Usher AICP Associate Planner

Subject: PA 13-074 Schmier Residence Single Family Dwelling Design Review
Application, 3328 Verdun Avenue, (APN: 039-231-130)

RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning Commission approve the project by making the following motions:

- A. Categorical Exemption (CEQA Section 15301(e) - Class 1 Existing Facilities)
- B. Single-Family Dwelling Design Review for construction of an 889 square foot second-story addition (and 149 square foot uncovered balcony) to an existing one-story single-family dwelling.

BACKGROUND

Site Description: The site is located at 3328 Verdun Avenue on the north side of Verdun Avenue (Attachment #1). This block of Verdun Avenue is a steeply sloped street with homes "terraced" down the slope which faces the San Francisco Bay. The immediate neighborhood consists of a mixture of one and two story residences that are primarily traditional in design typical of homes in the Beresford-Hillsdale Neighborhood that were constructed post World War II. The homes typically have stucco or wood siding exteriors, two car attached garages, and combinations of flat or low pitched gabled or hipped roof forms. The site is zoned R-1-B and the lot is 7,310 square feet with a maximum allowed floor area of 3,262 square feet.

Project Description: The project consists of an 889 square foot second-story addition (and a 149 square foot uncovered balcony) to an existing one-story single-family dwelling (Attachment #2). The existing house which was built in 1955 consists of 3 bedrooms and 2 full bathrooms with a two car garage, totally 2,367 square feet. The proposed project would add a new second story consisting of 2 bedrooms, a full bathroom, and a family room. The existing home is a ranch style residence with a gable roofline, wood siding, stone accents on the façade, and a tar and gravel roof. The proposed style is contemporary in appearance with a combination flat and sloped roofline for the proposed second story addition which is located toward the front of the residence.

Stucco is proposed for the main body of the proposed home in a light tan tone with stained cedar board siding accents and gray painted wood rim. Composition roof shingles are proposed, as well as black/bronze aluminum clad windows (Attachment #3). The addition complies with applicable Zoning Code requirements as conditioned, including but not limited to setbacks, parking, daylight plane, and maximum floor area (Attachment #4).

Project History: The Single Family Dwelling Design Review planning application was submitted on November 19, 2013, after a preliminary neighborhood meeting was held by the applicants at the project site on October 29, 2013.

Before the Planning Application was submitted, there was communication between the applicants and several homeowners in the project vicinity including but not limited to the adjacent upslope property owner regarding the proposed project (Attachment #5). The adjacent upslope property owner's principal concerns were related to impacts to their existing views from their residence located at 3334 Verdun Avenue. This residence is located upslope and is two-stories, with views to the East of the San Francisco Bay from the living room and bedroom windows. An outline of this residence (to the left of the project site as viewed from Verdun Avenue) with approximate window locations is included in the plan set (see sheet A1.5 of Attachment #5). The affected windows are along the side elevation. As drawn on sheet A1.5 of Attachment #5, the windows in the primary living areas are the triplicate windows (i.e. the third set of windows back from the street). The other windows are located in bedrooms.

After the planning application was submitted to the City staff had considerable communication with the upslope neighbor. Staff also had communication with other owners in the project vicinity who were concerned about preserving existing views from their residences should the owner below them propose a second story addition. Note that there is currently no other proposals for second story additions on Verdun Avenue that are currently under review by the Planning Division. In response to these concerns, staff performed site visits to the two directly impacted properties upslope of the project site including 3334 Verdun Avenue and 928 W. Hillsdale Boulevard, as well as one residence downslope at 3206 Verdun Avenue. All three of

these homeowners were concerned about the preservation of their existing views relative to a second story addition to a “downslope” residence.

To ensure consistency with the City’s Single-Family Design Guidelines (“Guidelines”) the City’s design review consultant, Larry Cannon, Architect, was commissioned to evaluate and analyze the proposed project for consistency with the Guidelines. The design review consultant prepared a total of three letters on the project, which are included as Attachment #6. All the letters are provided to provide a comprehensive history of the design review consultant process; however, the issues raised in the first and second letters were primarily addressed by revisions to the design. The project architect made several revisions to the original plans first submitted for review in November 2013 to comply with the staff and design review consultant’s recommendations related to compliance with the Guidelines. The plan revisions related to views and design included but were not limited to:

- Utilizing a flat roof for portions of the second story addition,
- Pulling the second story building line toward the street,
- Lowering the overall plate height, and
- Breaking up the two story wall facing Verdun Avenue.

After these revisions and the determination that the planning application was deemed complete and complied with all applicable Zoning Code requirements as conditioned and the Guidelines, a “Notice of Pending Zoning Administrator Decision” was mailed on May 2, 2014 with a ten day comment period. The Notice noted that that under the provisions of the San Mateo Zoning Code, no formal hearing need be held on this application. However, items may be referred to the Planning Commission if there are significant policy issues or substantial public opposition. This notice was mailed to over 100 homeowners and tenants within 500 feet of the project site, as well as all interested parties who contacted the City prior to the notice being mailed. During the 10 day comment period, staff received a total of 23 public comments. As a result of this large amount of correspondence (and other public comments received since the project was submitted formally) staff invited all interested parties who have contacted staff to date to a meeting at City Hall on May 7, 2014. The purpose of this meeting was to provide the interested parties with an opportunity to obtain more information about the proposed project as well as the Single Family Dwelling Design Review planning application process and Guidelines. This meeting was attended by approximately 19 interested parties, consisting primarily of homeowners in close proximity to the project site.

As a result of the high volume of public comments received regarding this project during the 10 day pending Zoning Administrator decision comment period and the attendance at the meeting, the Zoning Administrator determined that this application would be referred directly to the Planning Commission for review and action, pursuant to City of San Mateo Zoning Code Section 27.06.020 which states:

If the Zoning Administrator finds that any planning application involves an unresolved city policy issue or that there is public controversy regarding the application, the Zoning Administrator shall refer the application to the Planning Commission for hearing and action.

The City's Single-Family Design Guidelines

Design review is a key component of the evaluation of Single-Family Dwelling Design Review (SFDDR) planning applications. The City of San Mateo *Single-Family Design Guidelines* address the construction of new single-family dwellings and second story additions to single-family dwellings, and how the building's size, architectural character, and relations to the street and nearby houses contribute to successful neighborhoods. The intent of these Guidelines is to have new single-family dwellings and second story additions enhance the livability of San Mateo neighborhoods. The Guidelines establish basic criteria to consider when designing a house. Following the minimum criteria alone will not guarantee good design. A thoughtful application of the guidelines will insure consideration of the neighborhood context and other issues when developing a design, and reduce the potential for conflict and the delay and expense of project revisions. The Guidelines are not intended to require an identical, regimented design for every house in a neighborhood. However, they are designed to help the designer identify the key building characteristic and component that define the character of the neighborhood. There are a variety of creative ways in which a dwelling can be designed to incorporate those key elements, but still retain its own individual identity. The Guidelines are intended to help provide direction in this effort.

The City's Zoning Code Section 27.08.032 SINGLE FAMILY DWELLING DESIGN REVIEW (SFDDR) requires that in the review of the SFDDR Planning Application the Planning Division staff, the Zoning Administrator, Planning Commission, or the City Council, shall be guided by the Guidelines. The SFDDR planning application can be approved if the decision-maker can make a determination that the proposed structures, site plan, and landscaping are consistent with the adopted Guidelines.

As previously mentioned the City's Design Review consultant was commissioned to assist in reviewing the proposed project for compliance with the Guidelines in particular with respect to the two story walls on the facades, the contemporary style of the proposed exterior materials and design of the addition, and impacts to views of uphill homes. These issues were analyzed relative to the context of the immediate neighborhood. There are many two-story homes on the 3200 block of Verdun Avenue with a second floor that projects slightly over the first floor building wall on the front facade. Therefore these features were revised and strengthened on the proposed project, with the addition of belt trim at the second floor line the projection of oriel bay windows on the front façade, and trim at the garage to add visual depth to the façade.

A modification of the sloped roof was also incorporated into the project on the second floor to reduce visual mass as seen from the adjacent neighbor and to better relate to the other nearby homes. As noted in the design review comment letters, many homes in the immediate neighborhood have flat or low pitched roofs. The flat roof form on the west side of the second floor will be similar to the adjacent house to the west and the added belt trim and overhanging second floor bedrooms will relate well to the nearby homes (Attachment #6)

The principal issue raised by the residents in the area pertained to view impacts. The City's Single-Family Design Guidelines address view preservation by making conformance with the Single-Family Design Guidelines a prerequisite for approval (Zoning Code § 27.08.032(d)(1)).

The *Single-Family Design Guidelines* related to "Views" are as follows (Attachment #7):

A variety of view types are available from San Mateo neighborhoods: distant views of the Bay, adjacent parts of the City or Peninsula hills, city lights, and vistas through the neighborhood. Common characters of views are that they add value and enjoyment to a property. When adding onto a house, consider how the addition would affect the view from neighboring houses:

- A. Respect Established Views – Recognize established views from the primary living areas (living, dining, kitchen, etc.) of neighboring houses and design house additions to minimize blockage of these views. Possible methods to minimize view blockage include: configuring living space where it would have less view impact; increasing the setback of second story additions; lowering roof plate heights; and choosing roof forms that minimize mass.*
- B. View Equity – Neighboring views should be maintained to a similar level as that enjoyed by the proposed house addition. Balance the private rights to views from all parcels so that no single parcel should enjoy a greater view right than other similar parcels, except for the natural advantages of each site's topography.*

To help with determinations as to whether these Guidelines have been satisfied, the Guidelines offer the following questions for consideration:

- What are the established views from neighboring houses? For purposes of these Guidelines, the most important views would be from primary living areas, e.g., living, dining, kitchen rather than from secondary rooms, e.g., bedroom, bath.*
- To what degree would the proposed addition block views from neighboring houses?*
- Would the proposed addition create greater view blockage than other homes on similar parcels in the neighborhood?*
- Could the addition be designed to minimize view blockage from the neighboring house?*

Based on site visits conducted by staff and analysis by the City's Design Review Consultant, views as defined in the Guidelines from the property upslope of the project site at 3334 Verdun Avenue will be impacted most substantially from the bedroom window(s) and a portion from the living room windows. Features on the existing home at the project site and landscaping in the distance were very useful in visualizing where exactly the view shed would be impacted at 3334 Verdun by the proposed addition at 3328 Verdun. For example, when originally submitted the proposed second story building line which starts to the street side of the existing chimney blocked a portion of the total view, as seen from the center of the living room window. Specifically views south from an existing tree in the distance were blocked with the original submittal. This impact was since further reduced as reflected in the attached proposed plans and architect's photomontages with additional revisions to the building line, plate height, and roofline to preserve some additional views to the right of the existing tree in the distance. Therefore, established views of the primary living spaces (of the upslope neighboring residence) to the west are not substantially impacted by the second story addition to the east. Although the view is partially impacted by the addition, the majority of the view remains intact (Attachment #8).

Alternatives involving a completely flat roof line preserve more views of "sky" which are not a protected view type as specified in the Guidelines. A gable roofline in lieu of the proposed combination flat and low sloped roofline similarly does not further reduce view impacts. Other project alternatives for a second story such as relocating the addition over the rear of the residence, as opposed to the front of the residence as proposed, is precluded due to the City's requirement for a 25 foot setback for second story additions. And a one-story addition in lieu of a second story would require extensive remodeling of the existing first floor plan which is not currently proposed. The second story addition cannot be placed over the center of the house and still minimize view impacts to the upslope property. The proposed second-story addition to the existing one-story residence provides views of the San Francisco Bay as do existing two-story homes in the project vicinity with similar additions over the garage.

Based on concerns raised by the property owners of 928 W. Hillsdale Boulevard relative to impacts to their existing views, staff conducted a site visit. This residence fronts on W. Hillsdale; therefore, views of the San Francisco Bay are available from the back windows along the residence and in particular from the uncovered deck off the back of the home. Given the steep slope of this area, the proposed project minimizes impacts to views of the Bay from the primarily living area of 928 W. Hillsdale Boulevard.

Based on concerns raised by the property owners of 3206 Verdun Avenue, staff conducted a site visit to evaluate their residence relative to the impacts of the proposed project. Existing views from this residence are not impacted by the proposed addition as this home is "downslope". However, these owners are concerned the property below them may construct

an addition that would impact their existing views. Note no planning applications related to single family home additions are under review at this time in the vicinity of this residence.

In conclusion, staff finds that the proposed addition conforms to the City's Design Guidelines in that it minimizes view impacts from main living areas of the adjacent upslope property by its placement over the existing residence toward the street, with a portion of flat roof with 8 foot ceiling heights, and a sloped roofline of 2'1":12 that results in a plate height of 21 feet 2.5 inches (Attachment #9).

Established views of the primary living spaces (of the upslope neighboring residence) to the west are not substantially impacted by the second story addition to the east. Although the view is partially impacted by the addition, the majority of the view remains intact. The proposed addition primarily impacts the view of the adjacent residence to the (west of the project site) and does not significantly impact the view of other adjacent houses.

Alternatives to the proposed second story have been explored with respect to the placement of the second story addition which as previously mentioned would not meet the City's rear yard setbacks or the Design Guidelines for minimizing view impacts. A one story addition would require extensive reworking of the existing first floor plan. The proposed second-story addition to the existing one-story residence provides views of the San Francisco Bay as do existing two-story homes in the project vicinity with similar additions over the garage.

Furthermore, the project plans are in substantial conformance with the recommendations of the City's Design Review Consultant as he concluded in his final letter summarizing that the proposed design is appropriate to the neighborhood, would be attractive and of a scale and style that will be complimentary to the street based on the 8 foot ceiling heights and sloped roof form on the second floor to reduce visual mass seen from the adjacent neighbor, and will relate to the other nearby homes with enhancements to the façade that break up the two story walls.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Staff received numerous public comments which have been included in as an attachment to the Administrative Report (Attachment #10). In summary, the comments in opposition to the proposed project discuss economic impacts related to loss of view by one property as a result of another property's addition, view equity, the need and request for story poles, inadequacy of environmental review, and lack of compliance with the City's Design Review Guidelines all of which are addressed in detail in the Administrative Report (AR) and Findings for Approval Exhibit A. To summarize, the AR and Findings describe: how staff was able to analyze the project plans with existing landmarks in the field (consisting primarily of trees and the existing roof features of the project site) to visualize the proposed addition and assess impacts of the

proposed project without the placement of story poles, the intent of the Design Guidelines to minimize defined view impacts from primary living areas, the elements of the proposed design that relate to other nearby two story homes and break up the proposed two story elements, the ability for single story residence to have access to similar views of surrounding two story homes, and the limited scope of work and documentation of the lack of any "unusual" circumstances supporting the CEQA Class 1 exemption. Comments received in support of the application cited compliance with the City's Zoning Codes and Design Guidelines, and supported a balance of competing interests rather than precluding second story additions outright to ensure full preservation of existing views from all windows of a residence.

Overwhelmingly the correspondence received expressed interest in maintaining existing views in perpetuity (which would require revisions to the City's Design Guidelines), and/or establishing a view preservation ordinance, none of which are included in the scope of this planning application which is limited to a request for a second story addition to an existing one-story single family dwelling. Such an effort would ultimately include City Council direction to staff to initiate a review of the City's Design Guidelines, including a public participation process as part of that effort.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The proposed project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act guidelines. Section 21084 of the Public Resources Code requires the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines to include a list of "classes" of projects which have been determined not to have a significant effect on the environment and which shall, therefore, be exempt from the provisions of CEQA.

In response to that mandate, the Secretary for Resources has defined "classes" of projects that do not have a significant effect on the environment, and they are declared to be categorically exempt from the requirement for the preparation of environmental documents.

The proposed project including an 889 square foot addition to an existing 2,367 square foot single family residence meets the exemption criteria for Section 15301 Existing Facilities or Class 1.

The Class 1 exception consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of use beyond that existing at the time of the lead agency's determination. The types of "existing facilities" itemized below are not intended to be all-inclusive of the types of projects which might fall within Class 1. The key consideration is whether the project involves negligible or no expansion of an existing use. Examples include but are not limited to additions to existing structures

provided that the addition will not result in an increase of more than 50 percent of the floor area of the structures before the addition, or 2,500 square feet, whichever is less.

The proposed project includes an 889 square foot second story addition or 37% increase in floor area to an existing one-story 2,367 square foot single family residence thereby meeting the Class 1 CEQA exemption criteria.

Furthermore, the proposed project which includes a second-story addition to an existing single family residence in an established two-story single family neighborhood does not constitute any "unusual" circumstances differing from the general circumstances of projects covered by the single-family residence exemption in that: the proposed project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings as the aesthetics of the addition are consistent with the City's Design Guidelines; the project is located in an urban established single family neighborhood with a lot size of approximately 7,300 square feet and a mixture of one and two story homes; the addition does not increase the density of the site; the addition will not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista as defined in the General Plan; the the addition will not alter traffic patterns or cause traffic hazards; the project conforms to the zoning and general plan designation; the scope of work does not require grading nor is the site located in an area of unusual topography; no trees are proposed for removal; and the addition to the single family residence is located in an urbanized area currently served by municipal services, therefore, a project of this type and size will not significantly change or impact public services or require the construction of new or remodeled public service facilities.

EXHIBITS

- A. Findings for Approval
- B. Conditions of Approval

ATTACHMENTS

- 1. Vicinity Map
- 2. Project Plans
- 3. Materials Board
- 4. Single Family Data Form
- 5. Property Owner's Presentation and their Record of Correspondence with Neighbors
- 6. Design Review Consultant Letters
- 7. Excerpt from the City's Design Guidelines related to "Views"
- 8. Project Architect's Letters
- 9. Color Renderings of the Proposed Residence
- 10. Public Comments

CC (AR and attachments (hardcopy) via USPS First Class Mail)

Property Owners

Applicant

CC (Website link to AR and attachments via Email)

Interested Parties (if email address was provided)