

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Ross called the special teleconference-only meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Planning & Building Director Laura Russell called roll:

Present: ASCC: Commissioners Kenny Cheung, Megan Koch, and Al Sill; Chair Dave Ross and Vice Chair Jane Wilson.

Absent: None

Town Council Liaison: Vice Mayor Hughes

Town Staff: Planning & Building Director Laura Russell; Assistant Planner Dylan Parker; Consultant Planner, Suzanne Avila

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

Betsy Morgenthaler voiced a concern of her and her neighbors regarding the clearing that has taken place above the Sequoia Trail, and down the canyon, which exposes a vast previously-wooded area. While understanding that the wildfire risk must be addressed, she wondered whether the Conditional Use Permit for The Sequoias should be reviewed because of the profound potential ecological impact of the clearing. She feels this is short-term thinking. She expects the ASCC members might be hearing from others regarding this issue.

Chair Ross replied that perhaps staff can look into the situation and get back to her with comments.

Vice Chair Wilson stated that she received an email regarding this clearing from another concerned party and that the Town has also been emailed. She commented on the disparity between the Fire Marshal's perspective and the environmental issues. She reported that The Sequoias also have concerns about some new plantings and that the plan from a couple years ago should be looked at.

Laura Pogorzelska, Stonegate Road, asked if the email she sent was received regarding noise and the Neely Winery project.

Planning and Building Director Russell advised her that those comments will be batched with the winery project when it goes forward for ASCC and Planning Commission consideration.

NEW BUSINESS

(1) Conceptual Design Review of a new residence, File # PAR12-2021, 627 Westridge Drive, Murad/Bedford Residence (D.Parker and S.Avila)

Planning and Building Director Russell introduced Suzanne Avila, Consultant Planner, who joined the staff before the pandemic to work on some special projects. Ms. Avila was the previous Planning Director for Los Altos Hills and other nearby communities. On this design review, Ms. Avila worked with Assistant Planner Parker in the pre-application meeting phase, and the project is now being transitioned to Ms. Avila.

Ms. Avila wanted to make the ASCC aware that one of the discussion items involved the existing garage/carport structure that the owners intend to keep. She said staff wasn't able to find any inspection for the structure, but the property owner had found a record and provided it to staff. She said all the inspections were done, and this is one item that can be taken off of the discussion items.

Chair Ross invited questions from the Commissioners for Ms. Avila.

Commissioner Koch asked about the size of the existing carport and garage that is proposed to remain. Ms. Avila estimated about 700 feet. Commissioner Koch asked if that square footage was considered in the total square footage, and Ms. Avila confirmed that it was. Commissioner Koch asked if any additional comments from neighbors were received. Ms. Avila reported there was only the one neighbor comment, from the neighbor who has the easement that the driveway goes through.

Vice Chair Wilson asked about the number of covered and uncovered garage bays. Ms. Avila explained that the existing carport was not included. Since the property owners are considering the possibility of another use for the structure, it was not counted as required parking. Vice Chair Wilson asked which fault line passes through the property. Commissioner Koch commented that the fault is too minor to be named. Ms. Avila said it is a fault trace as opposed to a major fault line.

Commissioner Cheung mentioned the impervious surface exceeding the allowable limit and asked if the applicants were unaware of the requirement. Ms. Avila replied, although currently there is more impervious coverage than is allowed, she thought the applicants intended to keep it just under the maximum number of square feet.

Applicant, Kelly Bedford, interjected that they are trying to figure out how best to address this issue and are looking for guidance during this process. She said the driveway occupies a huge portion of the square footage, and they are looking for options to reduce it. She pointed out that they have minimal site coverage planned for landscaping beyond the house and the driveway. She asked if there is any credit given for the fire truck turnaround on the site coverage.

Chair Ross invited further questions from the Commissioners. Hearing none, he invited the applicants to present their project and ask questions.

Kelly Bedford, Applicant, shared comments regarding their preliminary project plans. She said they are very excited about the site, especially the oak trees. She said the house was designed with the trees in mind and is being placed where the existing house was for this reason. She commented on the existing garage and said they are keeping it to use as a work shed or gardening shed, as it is a good structure in good condition. She commented on the impervious area and that there is a very large turnaround for fire trucks. She described the modern farmhouse style, floor plan, materials, and the natural landscape plan.

Mr. Murad, Applicant, said they have worked with their architect on a previous project, and they expect a smooth experience. He echoed Ms. Bedford's excitement about the parcel, including the spectacular blue oak trees contained on it. He added that they are looking forward to being engaged with the community as well.

Kelly Willrich, Landscape Architect for the project, asked for further information regarding the impervious surface requirements and if there might be any credits to be applied.

Planning and Building Director Russell explained that all current codes must be complied with, although the applicant's efforts to reduce the impervious area will not go unnoticed by the Commission. There is no exemption for the fire truck turnarounds, but there is an exemption for extra-long driveways, which may apply in this case, and there are also some other minor exemptions which the Planner could work on with them. She suggested that sometimes credit is given for certain materials, such as geo-block, which can be applied in lightly-used areas.

Ms. Bedford shared that they have discussed removing the asphalt leading to the existing driveway, leaving natural grasses and a small pathway for access to the structure, since it will not be used for cars. This would reduce the impervious surface by approximately 1800 square feet. Commissioners Sill and Koch expressed support for this idea. Commissioner Koch suggested this might be an area where geo-blocks could be used.

Vice Chair Wilson asked, if the building were to be used as an ADU at some point, if some extra square footage would be allowed. Planning and Building Director Russell said she would have to look into what the State requirements would be for an exemption to the local zoning standards for certain ADUs. The Applicants responded that it would be far down the road if they were to consider an ADU, and they want to simplify the process as much as possible for right now.

Ms. Willrich inquired if they would be prevented from building a small barn or pool or playhouse in the future because they are so close to the max impervious limit. Planning and Building Director Russell responded that the max cannot be exceeded, so often people will reserve some area for possible future projects such as these. She advised them to think about future uses in their planning process. Commissioner Koch commented on the very long driveway as something to keep in mind.

Commissioner Koch asked if they had considered upcycled or recycling the brick. Ms. Willrich confirmed that they are definitely planning to use it somehow.

Commissioner Koch inquired about the lighting fixture which possibly might not meet the dark sky compliance. Ms. Willrich assured her that they are very willing to substitute a different fixture and are considering a simple barn light. Chair Ross added that there is a list of dark sky fixtures available, which the Town is comfortable with. Vice Chair Wilson noticed a light on the driveway gate and remarked that these are generally discouraged, other than to illuminate the house number.

Vice Chair Wilson asked about the two materials planned for the roof instead of all cedar shingles. Barbara Chambers, Architect, advised that this was simply based on aesthetics.

Vice Chair Wilson inquired about the number and height of the chimneys. Ms. Chambers explained that the chimneys are for gas fireplaces, as well as to contain the venting for the kitchen and other plumbing, also for aesthetic purposes. Assistant Planner Parker read from the Code that the chimneys may exceed the height limit for the zoning district, up to 50 feet maximum.

Chair Ross invited discussion among the Commissioners.

Commissioner Koch felt it would have been a difficult layout for a remodel, so a new build is the right path. She approved of creating more outdoor gathering area in the footprint. She said she loves the variations in building materials, feeling that it breaks up the mass of the structure. She

said her biggest concern is reducing the impervious surface, suggesting possibly using other materials and considering what the existing garage might or might not become. She encouraged the applicants, if considering a pool in the future, to remember to reserve and plan ahead for the impervious surface area needed. Overall, she affirmed the project, also complimenting the stunning trees.

Commissioner Cheung agreed with the previous comments and recommendations, but added that consideration of using fire safe materials is also very important and relevant at this time. He agreed that the variation in materials is attractive, but strongly advised the applicants to think carefully about the materials, noting that this is likely to impact insurance coverage and costs in the near future. Overall, he said it's a beautiful site and a fun project.

Commissioner Sill felt the design is perfect for the site. He agreed with Commissioner Cheung's comments regarding fire safety and cautioning that within the next few years it may not be legal to put wood shingles on a house. He suggested researching fire resistant materials which can create a pseudo wood shingle look. He encouraged minimizing landscaping to a small area close to the house to let the beauty of the land stand out. He also recommended minimal fencing, or no fencing.

Vice Chair Wilson said she also liked the design, but concurred the wood shingles are of concern as a fire hazard, especially with the tall trees adjacent to the tall roof. She agreed with previous comments regarding impervious surface reduction ideas and lighting recommendations. She personally doesn't like buildings built to maximum heights, but has no objection to it with this plan. She commented that she didn't have a copy of a landscape plan, so could not comment on landscaping.

Mr. Murad remarked that they are looking into modern fire resistant materials and modern alternatives to mitigate fire risk.

Chair Ross expressed his support of the project, the minimalist farmhouse effect, which is well-suited to the site. Regarding the black cedar shingle siding, he advised ensuring a weathered look as opposed to a monolithic black, which could spoil the effect. He was optimistic that the impervious surface requirements could be met by way of the recommendations discussed. He noted the applicants' dogs and stated they might need to explore a limited fenced area for them, adding a request that they be mindful of wildlife corridors should they construct a fence.

Mr. Murad asked if the landscape design had been submitted. Ms. Avila noted that it was not submitted in the packet she received. Assistant Planner Parker explained that the main focus at this point is on the design components, and the landscape plan has not been reviewed by the Conservation Committee, but will be included in the next step, the formal ASCC and Site Development Application. Vice Chair Wilson remarked that the Conservation Committee gives good advice on favorable native plantings and will be a good resource to consult before the final plan submission.

Chair Ross invited comments from the public. Hearing none, he invited final thoughts from the applicants.

Mr. Murad expressed their curiosity regarding the neighboring property, apparently abandoned for many years. Commissioner Sill knew of the property, but had no further information to share about it. Chair Ross suggested perhaps checking with local real estate agents.

COMMISSION, STAFF, COMMITTEE REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(3) Commission Reports

Commissioner Koch reported on the Ad Hoc Wildfire committee. Topics included evacuation routes; affordability for private landowners to be able to clear their land; Midpen's clearing of Windy Hill; the clearing around The Sequoias; insurance issues; and goat mitigation. She shared that Portola Valley seems to be taking the lead in this area, but that Marin has a strong program, which the Committee should study. She said she is glad to be on this important committee. She also reported that she noticed story poles on Degas Road. Planning and Building Director Russell said there is an active application that just came in for this.

Vice Chair Wilson reported that she became a Certified California Naturalist two weeks ago, and can now identify natives and invasives.

Commissioner Cheung had no activities to report, but did express his thought that excluding landscape architecture from the definition of design might cause some hurt feelings. Commissioner Sill agreed that it is a matter of what the focus is for conceptual design and whether there should be a conceptual landscape design. He would have liked to see the landscape design.

Planning and Building Director Russell offered that the procedure is a work in progress and that the idea was that people do not spend a lot of money on plans if there were going to be big changes. However, there will be some cases where the landscape is a more integral part of the conceptual design. Details will need to be discussed as the conceptual design process evolves. Chair Ross felt that if an applicant had an item that it ought to be in the packet for the conceptual design.

Chair Ross had one additional item to report, that the Priory discovered their approved material, the corrugated metal designed to rust, wasn't available from the manufacturer, but they had a substitute material that is essentially identical, and he feels indistinguishable from what ASCC reviewed.

Chair Ross invited comments from the public on Commissioners' reports.

Judy Murphy, Conservation Committee member, remarked in regard to including landscape design in the Conceptual Review that her Committee's main concern is that the ASCC may give certain comments or guidance to an applicant before they have done their "deep dive" investigation, which may end up reflecting a different perspective. She understands that the ASCC would enjoy seeing the plans, but hopes they are careful about comments that lock in details at this early stage which may make Conservation's advice irrelevant or confusing. She hopes the Conservation Committee and ASCC can work together to be in sync with each other.

Commissioner Koch asked Planning and Building Director Russell if Conservation currently sees a preliminary landscape plan if one exists. Planning and Building Director Russell said it hasn't been decided yet how this is to be handled in the process and is one of the details to be worked out. Commissioner Cheung expressed that the landscape plan is often a critical part of the conceptual design of the structure.

Chair Ross remarked that while Conservation's review is very valuable, he wouldn't advise they do their extensive investigation when a plan may change significantly. The plan could be routed

to a member of the Committee, who attends the Conceptual Review and offers preliminary comments.

Ms. Murphy felt uncomfortable with this in that each Conversation Committee member has their own area of expertise, and they would want the full Committee's input to give their best in-depth advice when they have their opportunity. She restated that their main concern is conflict between guidance given at Conceptual Review and Conservation's ultimate recommendations. She referenced a recent situation involving removal of redwood trees which led to significantly differing viewpoints. Commissioner Cheung said the ASCC is obligated to provide comment at Conceptual Review and that Conservation shouldn't constrain itself by not being present at this point.

Assistant Planner Parker offered a description of staff's interactions with an applicant at the pre-application stage, at which time most applicants have a very basic plan and are still gathering documents for formal submission. The process as it has evolved so far is to first look at large, non-starter issues with the structure itself which may stand in the way of a project moving forward.

Chair Ross commented that, in addition to simply a plant list or tree plan, an applicant may also want input on physical structures, such as retaining walls, and may ask for guidance at the conceptual design stage, which is appropriate. However, he recommended advice should be clearly expressed as preliminary, as opposed to final approval. Staff can help the ASCC keep this in mind as they give advice.

Commissioner Koch said the landscape lighting can be a big issue. She suggested if no landscape plan is submitted, the Commission could perhaps give some blanket advice indicating their general views on things such as lighting and plantings.

Chair Ross re-emphasized that the ASCC and Conservation Committee should work to be in sync with each and not competition.

Chair Ross invited further comments from the public.

Betsy Morgenthaler supported both Commissioner Cheung's perspective of incorporation of the landscape architecture at all stages, as well as Conservation's desire to be thorough and relevant, advocating for the power of committees working in sync. She noted that language at committee meetings should be as precise as possible, citing the conversation about "clearing" at the recent fire committee meeting, and that it was not apparent to all what this term was describing. She agreed there is power in bringing committees together, especially with all the current issues to be dealt with.

Chair Ross invited further comments from the public. Hearing none, he closed the public comments.

(4) Staff Report

There being no staff items to report, Chair Ross queried Planning and Building Director Russell about the number of items of business coming up.

Planning and Building Director Russell replied that the items will likely continue at the current pace, as staff is spreading out the application submittals. Zoom meetings have helped facilitate this steady and measured approach.

Chair Ross invited comments from the public. Hearing none, he closed the public comments.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

(5) ASCC Meeting of March 8, 2021

Chair Ross invited corrections, revisions or comments. Hearing none, he invited a motion for approval of the minutes. Hearing none, he entertained a motion to approve the minutes.

Commissioner Koch moved to approve the March 8, 2021, minutes as submitted. Seconded by Commissioner Sill, the motion passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT [5:31 p.m.]