

LARKSPUR PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 26, 2016

The Larkspur Planning Commission was convened at 7:00 p.m. in the Larkspur City Council Chambers by Chair Tauber

Commissioners Present: Chair Laura Tauber, Monte Deignan, Daniel Kunstler,

Commissioners Absent: Mark Sandoval, Todd Ziesing

Staff Present: Senior Planner Kristin Teiche

### OPEN TIME FOR PUBLIC EXPRESSION

There were no comments.

### PLANNING DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- The Bon Air/South Eliseo intersection will be back in working order soon- the plans have been completed and they are in the process of re-installing the left turn lane. Work will continue by AT&T and the City near the bridge for a while but an open lane will always be maintained.
- She gave an update on the pavement schedule. Measure "C" funds are now being utilized and the contractor has been given notice to begin projects. Informational signs have gone up around town.
- An Arbor Day Tree Planting Celebration will be held at Heatherwood Park on Friday, April 29<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. Funds received by the City for the Cool California Challenge are paying for the trees.
- A Nextdoor account had been created for the City of Larkspur. It will be used to augment public outreach.

### PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS

1. **DR/FAR/V #16-11; Eric Layton, Patriarch Architects, Applicants; Kristin Bennett, Owner; 8 Alexander Avenue, Larkspur; Assessor's Parcel: 021-181-186; R-1 (First Residential) Zoning District. The applicant is requesting approval of permits to allow substantial remodeling and new additions totaling 931 sq. ft. to an existing 1,370 sq. ft., single story, single family residence, including: 1) Design Review; 2) Variance to the side yard setback to permit new improvements with a 3-foot side setback where 5 feet is required; 3) Variance to required parking to allow the provision of two uncovered parking spaces where four are required (one covered) for the substantial renovation and remodeling of a single family structure.**

Senior Planner Teiche presented the staff report.

Chair Tauber opened the Public Hearing.

Mr. Eric Layton, architect, made the following comments:

- They understood the Commission's prior issues and concerns.
- The new application has reduced the intensity of the project by reducing the number of bedrooms. They took out the bedroom and bathroom downstairs.
- The applicant needs storage and a laundry room- it is difficult to locate these on the main level.
- Adding a second bedroom or a laundry room on the top level does not make sense for a family.

- The plan needs some access to the basement and this pushes the stairs down. He explored different locations for the stairs but they did not work. They decided to keep the variance request for the stairs in the proposed location.
- They have tried to reduce the “busyness” of the elevation facing 10 Alexander Avenue. They reduced the number and size of the windows on that side of the project.
- They removed the fence on that side yard.
- The neighbor at 10 Alexander Avenue is opposed to adding any square footage in the back. The additional square footage is tucked away on the other side.
- The previous application was over the allowable FAR. They are not asking for an FAR Exception.
- This is a relatively small lot and the percentages are difficult.
- They dropped the height by 9 inches by dropping the plate heights.
- They added a dormer to help with the articulation. Adding the gable end gives the project some three-dimensionality. He pointed to another location (alley side facing the church) where a gable end could be added.
- The project looks good from a bulk and mass perspective- it does not look “looming”.
- He read a letter from the neighbor.
- The amount of excavation has been reduced along with the foundation work.

Commissioner Kunstler stated the driveway to the west of the house was of marginal utility and dangerous due to the location of the utility meters. He asked if they have thought about improving the exterior of the house with some planting or vegetation and perhaps removing that driveway. Mr. Layton stated this could be discussed. Turf block could be used along with paver strips. They might have to install a bollard to protect that gas meter.

Mr. James Holmes, Larkspur, made the following comments:

- This application shows the problems with being inflexible with regard to the natural state. Most of the reduction has been at the basement level.
- The house is still fairly intensive- there have not been any substantial changes in the mass and bulk.
- It would have been more defensible to provide a variance and put the additional floor space underneath and reduce some of what is on the top.
- Four bedrooms are too much- three bedrooms are reasonable.
- He asked the Commission to keep in mind that they are not planning just one building but rather two- this structure is the same as the one next door.

Senior Planner Teiche clarified that the Natural State provisions do not apply to this property because it has an average grade of less than 10%- they are only working with lot coverage and floor area. The hardscape is not counted on a lot of less than 10%.

Chair Tauber closed the Public Hearing.

Commissioner Deignan provided the following comments:

- The last application had problems with the side yard variance (3' instead of 5') and the bulk and mass of the second floor.
- He agreed with Mr. Holmes- it would have made more sense to make the reductions to the second floor which had bulk and mass issues and maintain the development in the basement. It would have been less visible from the street and less intrusive to the neighbors. The reduction to the second floor was only 8 square feet and it needs to go further.
- He was concerned about the variance to the side yard to permit improvements within three feet of the driveway.

- He referred to the Design Review application and noted this was a top-heavy, over developed building.
- He agreed with Mr. Holmes that this could set a precedent.
- He could support rooms below grade that do not count towards the FAR.
- He drove by the project, looked at the story poles, and could not see a discernable difference in the project.
- He could not make the findings.

Commissioner Kunstler provided the following comments:

- He did not attend the meeting where the first proposal was discussed.
- The design at the front of the house is attractive.
- This project is an intensive development to a small property even though it complies with the FAR.
- The size of the project (about 2,300 square feet) is not out of scale with development in the neighborhood. It is a fairly normal sized house.
- The second story is set back fairly well.
- He does not like over-excavation of properties but this amount (40 cubic feet) does not seem out of line.
- The parking patterns in the neighborhood are peculiar with intensive use due to the school, the church, and the ballpark. He could approve the parking variance.
- He is bothered by the intense use of the property.
- He disagreed with Mr. Holmes' assertion that this could be a precedent.
- He was leaning towards approval of the project.

Chair Tauber provided the following comments:

- She is also on the fence.
- The story poles did not seem to change.
- She understood the suggestion that the master bedroom should be located underneath instead of on top- but personally she would not want her master bedroom in the basement.
- They tried to keep the addition in the character of a bungalow.
- She appreciates the reduction of a bedroom.
- She wished the parking situation was better but understood the problems with the lot.
- She is not troubled about the issue regarding setting a precedent.
- She recognizes the desire of the applicant to make this a functional house for a family.
- The setback does bother her- it is very close and a future next-door neighbor might be bothered by it.
- She cannot quite get there- she would like to see them try one more time. .

Commissioner Kunstler provided the following comment:

- He referred to the neighboring property and stated he would not consider the impact on new property owners to be an overarching factor.

Commissioner Deignan provided the following comments:

- Design Review is one way to take care of a large house that overbuilds a lot.
- This two-story building would be within 3 feet of the neighboring property- this is overbuilding.
- They are redoing so many things that exceed the value of the home- it is very close to being a "new house".
- The proposal should come closer to complying with local ordinances.
- There are no hardships that would justify the variances.

Senior Planner Teiche asked the Commission not to get too hung up about the notion of whether a neighbor loses or gains property value from a development. Design Review is about form and

function- does the proposal relate well to its surroundings and the neighborhood and will it create a pleasant environment for everyone living around it.

Commissioner Deignan stated a continuance would be appropriate since they are very close to an approval.

M/s, Deignan/Kunstler motioned and the Commission voted 3-0-2 (Sandoval and Ziesing absent) to continue DR/FAR/V 16-11, 8 Alexander Avenue to a date uncertain based on the inability to make the findings.

## **BUSINESS ITEM**

### 1. Commissioners Reports

Commissioner Kunstler stated he attended last week's City Council meeting regarding the new Library/Community Center facility. The Council has decided to continue the process at the City Council level and is reluctant to spend any more money, at this time, on more design proposals.

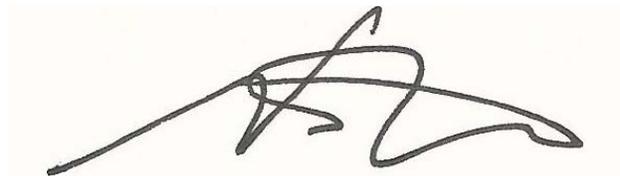
### 2. Approval of minutes of Planning Commission meeting on April 12, 2016

M/s, Deignan/Tauber motioned and the Commission voted 2-0-3 (Kunstler abstained, Sandoval & Ziesing absent) to approve the April 12, 2016 minutes as submitted.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.  
Respectfully submitted,

Toni DeFrancis,  
Recording Secretary

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing minutes were duly and regularly adopted at a regular meeting of the Larkspur Planning Commission on May 10, 2015.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neal Toft', is written over a light beige rectangular background.

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Neal Toft, Planning Director