

LARKSPUR PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 12, 2017

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

Commissioners Present: Chair Daniel Kunstler, Monte Deignan, Laura Tauber, Ignatius Tsang, Todd Ziesing

Staff Present: Planning Director Neal Toft
Associate Planner Anna Camaraota

OPEN TIME FOR PUBLIC EXPRESSION

There were no comments.

PLANNING DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- City Hall will be closed from December 22nd through January 1st.
- The Planning Commission meeting of December 26th is cancelled- the next meeting will be held on January 9th. This meeting will include the election of the Chair and Vice Chair.
- Staff has been in communication with the representatives of St. Patrick's parish about Homeward Bound using the parish convent for homeless seniors. This issue will come before the Commission for a Use Permit. No applications have been submitted but they have been doing some community outreach. Chair Kunstler asked about the size of the facility. Planning Director Toft stated they were looking at about twelve beds.

PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS

1. **DR/FAR/V #17-37: 72 Heather Way (APN: 021-201-20); Pacific Design Group, applicant; James and Lindsey Hunnewell, property owners; R-1 (Single Family Residential) Zoning District. Request for the following permit approvals to allow demolition of an existing two-story single-family residence and construction of a new two-story single-family residence with an attached single-car garage: 1) Design Review (DR); 2) Floor Area Ratio (FAR) Exception to allow a total of 2,500 square feet of floor area, resulting in a 0.45 FAR where 0.33 is the maximum FAR permitted due to the 17 percent average slope of the lot; 3) Variance (V) to allow a street (left) side setback of five (5) feet, where 10 feet is required by code; and 4) Variance (V) to allow three off-street parking spaces, including one covered space within a single-car garage, where four (4) off-street spaces are required by code.**

Associate Planner Camaraota presented a staff report.

Commissioner Tauber asked about the applicant purchasing the City owned right-of-way. Associate Planner Camaraota stated that had been discussed in the past but there were some encumbrances and this request could not be accommodated.

Commissioner Ziesing asked about the air-condensing unit and the setback requirements. Associate Planner Camaraota stated staff will work with the applicants to make sure these requirements are met along with the noise control regulations.

Mr. Ed Blankenship, architect with Pacific Design Group, made the following comments:

- This is a wonderful location to practice architecture.
- The existing home is two-story- there is an odd second story addition to the right side.
- The existing garage was converted a long time ago.
- The property is at the corner of Chanticleer and Heather giving it a great prominence to the community.
- The lot is on an upslope.
- The proposed basement is a good solution to some of the storage issues.
- He has tried to maintain the historic patterns of the home.
- The garage has been brought up to conformance for a single car.
- They have wrapped an enclosed porch around the edge which allows the corner to be prominently displayed and the living area to be pulled back further from the street. This provides some privacy.
- The home to the rear is on an upslope providing a buffer and privacy.
- The home is open to the back with a family room and kitchen. They have expanded into the back yard.
- There is a deck proposed off the upper floor master bedroom.
- They have tried to pull the proposal in on all sides.
- The downstairs includes a small guest room, dining room, and bathroom.
- The upslope would allow them to excavate under the home to create some storage space.
- The colors are traditional Craftsman- dark roof, white trim, grey shingle siding, and cobble stone base.
- They are proposing a 6' high fence around the home but have agreed to reduce the height if necessary.

Mr. James Hunnewell, property owner, made the following comments:

- He thanked the Commission for all the work they do in protecting Larkspur.
- He has been trying to figure out who owns the land parcel behind his house.
- He maintains it at a cost of about \$1,500 per year (trees, landscaping, etc.)
- He would like to eventually acquire it.
- The existing house needs repairs.
- He would like to install a natural fence and a hedge. The fence is not a sticking point.
- The landscaping and terracing in the back is very important. The back yard is not safe for his young children.
- They will be doing some geotechnical studies since they will be excavating.
- They tried to minimize the number of windows on the neighbor's side. They are open to using frosted glass for the bathroom window.
- The wrap-around porch will be a place for people to gather.

Ms. Arlene Fox made the following comments:

- She submitted comments this morning.
- The house is falling apart.
- She likes the exterior design- it is consistent with other new homes in the area.
- She appreciates the upper story setbacks.
- She asked the owners to reduce the fence height.
- The City would be installing a sidewalk on the Chanticleer side of the home and she asked if the existing parking spots would be eliminated. She asked if the curbs would be painted red.
- Parking in the area is challenging.
- The second story addition faces east and she has privacy concerns. The bathroom windows should be frosted or clerestory.

Mr. Steve Witcomb made the following comments:

- There is not a single house on that street that complies with the 20' setbacks.
- He is concerned about this requirement being applied to this project because it pushes the house back into the hill which pushes it beyond his house.
- He would like to see the upper bathroom windows frosted or clerestory if possible.
- He asked if the air conditioning unit would be in some type of structure. He was concerned about the noise.

Ms. Alison Revell, Heather Way, made the following comments:

- The design fits well into the neighborhood.
- She supports the project.

Mr. Mike Fender, Chanticleer Avenue, made the following comments:

- He is impressed with the design. It is tasteful and respectful of the neighborhood.
- The project will enhance the neighborhood and be a wonderful addition.
- He supports the project.

Mr. Alan Berman, Heather Way, made the following comments:

- He appreciates what the property owners have gone through- a long, strenuous process.
- The house is well designed and would fit in well on Meadowood Drive- but not in Heather Gardens.
- The "elephant in the room" is the extraordinary size of the structure.
- Heather Way is essentially a one-lane road with parking limited to one side of the road.
- The structure would be three times the size of its immediate neighbors.
- The existing house already exceeds the FAR.
- This is a 2,990 foot structure if the below grade basement is counted- a 0.55 FAR (2/3rds larger than permitted).
- The proposed basement could accommodate an additional resident with an additional vehicle.
- This proposal would substantially change the character of the neighborhood and add to the already crowded parking situation.
- The size of the structure should be substantially reduced.

Ms. Lindsey Hunnewell made the following comments:

- There are electrical and plumbing problems in the existing house.
- The only option is to redevelop.
- They are not intending to change the integrity of the neighborhood.

Mr. Blankenship made the following comments:

- There will be no loss of parking. The Public Works Department is introducing an extended sidewalk.
- The fence and upstairs bathroom issues could be worked out.
- They are comfortable with the FAR due to the large buffer of land and separation.
- He referred to the plans and pointed to the location of the air conditioning units. It would be about five feet from the property line. It is the quietest unit on the market. It could be relocated.
- The basement area cannot be used as living space. It is strictly for storage.
- They are trying to accommodate as many zoning requirements as possible.

Chair Kunstler closed the Public Hearing.

Commissioner Ziesing provided the following comments:

- This is a well designed structure for the property.
- This is a larger house than what currently exists but the lot coverage is minimal at 32%.
- The footprint is relatively the same.
- He could support the FAR even though it is on the higher side.
- He is more accommodating on the FAR on smaller lots.
- He likes the design.
- He could support the Parking Variance.
- The fence issue will be worked out.
- He could support the application as is.

Commissioner Deignan provided the following comments:

- He could make the Design Review Findings.
- He could make the FAR Findings even though the basement does not count and will add to the intensity of use.
- They would end up with a lot of wide garages and driveways if they enforced the parking requirements (two off-street and two covered). The parking solution is a good one.
- He is concerned about the side yard variance. A variance is a higher hurdle.

Commissioner Tauber provided the following comments:

- She likes the design- it is very attractive.
- They are trying to come up with something that is an asset to the neighborhood.
- She likes the fact that they are keeping the trees.
- She appreciated the fact the proposal steps back from the street.
- She could approve the Parking Variance.
- They have made an effort to improve the parking.
- She is concerned about the height- it sticks out on this corner lot.
- This house is a lot bigger than the others in the neighborhood.
- The story poles depict a taller house.

Commissioner Tsang provided the following comments:

- There are a lot of things going on in this site and they did a lot of things to try to mitigate it.
- This is an uphill slope and the building is pushed to the back forcing the building to be square and give the impression of bulkiness.
- The owners will eventually own that side property so the side yard setback is not an issue.
- He likes the porch and the idea of using it as a community gathering space.
- He is concerned about the height- it could be dropped a bit.
- Privacy on the right hand side has been improved.
- The bathroom window could be frosted or put on the back side near the sink.
- The front bedroom window could be relocated.
- He is concerned about the bulkiness.

Chair Kunstler provided the following comments:

- The FAR is at 0.45 but he thinks this is mitigated.
- Variance and exceptions are "more than guidelines but less than gospel".
- The porch is a substantial mitigating feature- it lends openness to the property.
- The other mitigating factor is that the house is attractive on all sides.
- The house is tall.
- He could support the Design Review and the FAR Exception.

- This neighborhood is changing and there is a need to accommodate real families and contemporary living.
- He has a hard time viewing this home as excessive.
- This structure does not go overboard.
- The condition regarding the auxiliary (AC) unit should be enforced.
- The street side setback from a visual standpoint is somewhat fictitious.

Commissioner Ziesing provided the following comments:

- The FAR would go down to 0.36 if they added in the supplemental piece of land.
- The visual nature of the lot is 6,900 square feet.

Commissioner Deignan provided the following comments:

- He agreed that that supplemental piece of property gives the illusion of a larger area for FAR purposes.
- He is still concerned about the side yard setback- there is a two-story element out five feet further than normal on a prominent corner.

M/s, Ziesing/Tsang, motioned and the Commission voted 3-2 (Deignan and Tauber voted no) to approve DR/FAR/V #17-37, 72 Heather Way, subject to the findings and conditions set forth in the staff report with the condition that the A/C unit be reconfigured to conform to minimum setbacks applicable to detached accessory structures.

Chair Kunstler stated there was a 10-day appeal period.

- 2. DR/FHE #17-32: 114 Alexander Avenue (APN 021-183-17); Kenneth Holder, applicant; Sternberg Family Trust, property owners; R-1 (Single Family Residential) Zoning District. Request for the following permit approvals to allow demolition of an existing two-story single-family residence with a detached two-car garage, storage shed, covered patio, wood deck and pool equipment shed, and to allow construction of a new two-story single-family residence with an attached two-car garage and renovation of an existing in-ground pool; 1) Design Review (DR) to allow construction of a new two-story single-family residence; and 2) Fence Height Exception (FHE) to allow solid fencing up to eight feet in height and vegetative screening (hedgerows) up to 12 feet in height along portions of the rear and side property line.**

Associate Planner Camaraota presented a staff report.

Chair Kunstler asked about the comparable floor area ratios in the neighborhood. Associate Planner Camaraota stated she did not do an analysis but there are no consistent patterns of lots or home sizes in this neighborhood. There are similarly sized homes.

Mr. Kenneth Holder, Holder Design, made the following comments:

- This was a unique process- these clients were willing to limit themselves to the Design Review standards.
- The owners have a strong interest in maintaining the contextual look and feel of the neighborhood.
- This is a regionally inspired Craftsman style home
- There are no requests for variances.
- There are two minor fence line exception requests that were coordinated with the neighbors.
- The design was submitted to all the contiguous neighbors.

- The house reflects a neighbor-friendly design with deep setbacks (especially on the second story).
- The proposal calls for the demolition of five non-conforming structures.
- This is a carefully sited home design with modulated masses, low roof lines, and an attractive, modest architectural character.
- They are increasing the FAR by a small amount.
- The design acknowledges the street with an approachable social presence.
- The house design has all the primary living spaces on the main level with few windows looking towards the side properties.
- The upstairs has three small bedrooms and a playroom.
- The design is appropriate for the neighborhood- an extension of the Larkspur architectural vernacular.
- The simple gable and shed roof forms with extended overhangs are intended to reduce visual massing.
- The low, front picket fence is part of a new landscaping design and would provide a welcoming statement for such a prominent location.
- The existing pool will remain in the same location.
- The plant species would cap out at twelve feet.

Mr. Jay Sternberg, owner, made the following comments:

- He grew up in Larkspur. The prior owner wanted him to own the property.
- They finally came to the realization that they would need to demolish the home and start over.
- This has been a three-year process.
- He asked the architect to design a project that did not require any variances or exceptions.
- The Fence Height Exception was a function of collaboration with the neighbors.

Chair Kunstler closed the Public Hearing.

Commissioner Tsang provided the following comments:

- The design is intentional and sympathetic to what surrounds it.
- He noted the family room was on the west side and had double doors- this could be an issue to the neighbors. They could flip-flop this room with the dining room.
- This is a very long house on a trapezoidal lot. They have room to move the house to the front of the lot.
- They are using similar window sizes for different functions- they should be broken up.
- He likes the regional Craftsman architecture. The house has depth and is interesting.

Commissioner Tauber provided the following comments:

- She likes the design a lot- it makes sense for this location.
- She can make the Design Review findings and the Fence Height Exception findings.
- She can support the project.

Commissioner Deignan provided the following comments:

- This is a sympathetic design that fits in this historic neighborhood.
- It is a nice contemporary style.
- He commended the owners for not pushing the boundaries.
- He can make the findings.

Commissioner Ziesing provided the following comments:

- He can make the findings.

- The project will fit nicely in the neighborhood.
- This is a nice design.

Chair Kunstler provided the following comments:

- This is a large and long home along the street. This is mitigated by the attractiveness of the design and the baseball field across the street.
- He could support the Design Review and Fence Height Exception applications.

M/s, Deignan/Tauber, motioned and the Commission voted 5-0 to approve DR/HTR #17-32, 114 Alexander Avenue, subject to the findings and conditions set forth in the staff report.

Chair Kunstler stated there was a 10-day appeal period.

BUSINESS ITEMS

1. Commissioners' reports

Chair Kunstler reported he was told by a resident that an emergency vehicle has a difficult time finding their home (Myrtle and Holly) due to a signage issue. City Hall has responded to the problem.

2. Approval of minutes of Planning Commission meeting on November 14, 2017

M/s, Tauber/Ziesing, motioned and the Commission voted 5-0 to approve the November 14, 2017 minutes as submitted.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 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 January 23, 2018.



Neal Toft, Planning Director