

LARKSPUR PLANNING COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF OCTOBER 27, 2020

The Larkspur Planning Commission was convened at 7:00 p.m. by Chair Tauber via teleconference due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Commissioners Present: Chair Laura Tauber, Natasha Chalmers, Daniel Kunstler, Jeffrey Swisher, Brock Wagstaff

Staff Present: Planning Director Neal Toft  
Senior Planner Kristin Teiche  
Assistant Planner Aaron Matthews

### OPEN TIME FOR PUBLIC EXPRESSION

There were no comments.

### PLANNING DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- The General Plan Steering Committee completed its work several weeks ago and staff presented a status report to the City Council. Staff is working on some final edits on the Administrative Draft and will begin the process of public review including a scoping session and informational workshops.
- He also brought the Council up to speed on several projects including the ADU Website and Workbook that has been a collaborative effort with the County and other jurisdictions. This is a resource for property owners who want to develop an ADU. Another collaborative project, which is funded through the State, is an Inclusionary Housing and Fee Nexus Study. Another County wide effort is the Objective Design and Developments Standards. They are getting ready to launch a draft toolkit.
- Staff will begin work on updating the Housing Element, selecting sites, and developing data and demographics.
- Staff is beginning the process of opening to the public with in-house appointments. There are no plans to hold in-person public meetings as group gatherings remain a concern.

Commissioner Wagstaff asked about Larkspur's Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) numbers. Planning Director Toft stated the current methodology used by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) gives Larkspur a little over 1,000 units for this cycle. Larkspur has several transit hubs and "high resource" areas. Chair Tauber stated the pandemic is resulting in more people working from home and fewer commuters and she asked if there has been any push-back. Planning Director Toft stated those issues are being raised.

### PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS

1. **DR/FAR #19-27; 32 La Cuesta Drive, (APN: 070-263-09); Jeffrey S. Cavener, Architect, Applicant; Mauro and Beverly Passetti: Owners; R-1 (First Residential) Zoning District. Applicants are requesting the following permits to construct a 24 square foot second story addition and a new 200 square foot ground story garage/addition to an existing two-story residence on a 15,202 square foot parcel: 1) Design Review (DR) for additions and exterior modifications to an existing single family dwelling; 2) Floor Area Ratio Exception (FAR) to increase the existing 3,801 square foot residence with a 0.25 FAR to 4,025 square feet and a 0.26 FAR where 0.17 FAR is permitted due to the slope of the lot.**

Senior Planner Teiche presented the staff report. She recommended the following Condition of Approval: 1) The vegetative screening (hedge row) shown on the landscape plan be placed on the subject property and not 28 La Cuesta.

Commissioner Kunstler had a question about a late piece of mail regarding the height of the garage. Senior Planner Teiche stated the plan depicts a revised garage addition that is lower as requested by the Commission. Chair Tauber stated the plan indicates the roofline reads like a continuation of the eyebrow on the existing garage as requested. Senior Planner stated the prior elevation was 13 feet and it has been lower by 2 feet.

Commissioner Wagstaff asked if the location of the eyebrow is the same as indicated in the prior plans. Chair Tauber stated she thought so. Sr. Planner Teiche confirmed that it is.

Chair Tauber opened the Public Hearing.

Mr. Jeff Cavener, project architect, made the following comments:

- The eyebrow is unchanged from the original application.
- They have lowered the garage addition two feet to the height of the eyebrow.

Commissioner Wagstaff referred to Elevation Sheet 3.2 and stated the proposed north elevation shows a break between the eyebrows but the west elevation does not. Mr. Cavener stated that was a good catch- the eyebrow jogs back two feet and this should have been reflected in the west elevation.

Mr. Kevin Haroff, La Cuesta Drive, made the following comments:

- He is testifying as a neighbor.
- He lives next door to the subject property.
- The story poles were erected late yesterday or earlier today.
- He spoke for Ms. Karen McConnell who encouraged the Commission to defer a decision on this application until consideration can be given to how the applicants have managed the story pole issue.

Ms. Mara Passetti, representative for the applicants, made the following comments:

- The story poles were put up yesterday – there were delays in getting an available crew.
- They have listened to all the comments and made all the requested adjustments.
- Lowering the roof line makes the add-on garage look like a storage unit attached to the existing garage. She preferred the taller elevation of the previous plan.
- They recently put up a new fence between the subject property and 28 La Cuesta. The neighbor was allowed to pick the fence style and the type of plants.
- The plants will create a nice barrier and some privacy.
- The new structure will not cast any shadows.
- There is 18 feet from the new structure to the new fence on the subject property side- this is ample space.

Chair Tauber closed the Public Hearing.

Commissioner Chalmers provided the following comments:

- She did not attend the October 13<sup>th</sup> meeting but reviewed all the plans, correspondence, and listened to the recording.
- She looked at the story poles today.
- The revised plan is a vast improvement and is more aesthetically pleasing.
- The concern about the height of the garage has been addressed.
- Justification for the FAR Exception was addressed in the previous staff reports.

- She could approve the application with the additional Condition of Approval recommended by Senior Planner Teiche.

Commissioner Swisher provided the following comments:

- He agreed with the comments made by Commissioner Chalmers.
- The applicants have done what they were asked to do.
- Lowering the garage by two feet improves the massing effect of the house.
- Building the fence and planting the trees will mitigate the massing on that side of the house.
- He is happy with the revised plans.

Commissioner Kunstler provided the following comments:

- He agreed with the comments made by Commissioners Swisher and Chalmers.
- Lowering the garage is an improvement.
- Story poles should be installed more promptly.
- He could make the findings for approval.

Commissioner Wagstaff provided the following comments:

- He went to the site today and saw the story poles.
- The revisions are an improvement.
- The new fence looks great.
- He can approve the project.

Chair Tauber provided the following comments:

- She agreed with the other Commissioners.
- Story poles are installed for the benefit of the staff, Commission, and the public. They should be put up in a timely basis.
- She could make the findings to approve the project.

M/s, Swisher/Kunstler, motioned and the Commission voted 5-0 to approve DR/FAR #19-27; 32 La Cuesta Drive, subject to the findings and conditions set forth in the staff report plus the additional condition recommended by Senior Planner Teiche.

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

- 2. H/DR/FAR/V/SUP #19-38; 8 Loma Vista Avenue (APN: 021-231-10); David Svengros, Applicant/Owner: R-1 (First Residential) Zoning District. Applicant is requesting the following permits to allow new additions totaling 813 square feet to an historic single-family dwelling (including a new detached garage in the front yard), removal of the existing pool in the front yard, removal of the existing detached garage in the rear yard, installation of a new rear yard pool, and site landscaping: 1) Heritage Review; 2) Design Review of exterior modifications and proposed detached garage; 3) Floor Area Ratio Exception to increase the square footage on site from 3,882 square feet and 0.37 FAR to 4,697 square feet and a 0.45 FAR, where a 0.32 FAR is permitted; 4) Slope Use Permit to allow site work that will result in 236 cubic yards of grading on a lot with an average slope of 18%; 5) Variance to the 6-foot side yard setback to allow a new wood deck over an existing patio up to the south side lot line, and to increase the height of the retaining wall on the lot line to maintain required railing height.**

Senior Planner Teiche presented the staff report.

Commissioner Kunstler asked if there were fencing requirements for the pool. Senior Planner Teiche stated yes there could be, or they could employ alternatives security measures to fencing.

Commissioner Chalmers asked if the trees that run up the left hand side of the driveway would remain. Senior Planner Teiche stated she has not received a request to remove them.

Commissioner Swisher stated a neighbor expressed concern that the new design would limit emergency access to the back of the house. Senior Planner Teiche stated the Fire Department has reviewed the project several times and did not express concerns about access to the backyard.

Chair Tauber opened the Public Hearing.

Ms. Sam Svengros and Mr. David Svengros, applicants, made the following comments:

- They gave a Powerpoint presentation.
- This is a robust project.
- The house has a Category B historic designation. It was built in 1937.
- It is an example of Spanish Colonial Revival but a different type from the others in Larkspur.
- This house has the original terra cotta tile, railings, and fixtures.
- The goals are to restore the house to its "intended glory".
- They plan to do some modest modernizations- open the kitchen and add a home office and master bedroom upstairs.
- There is a lot of deferred maintenance.
- The front pool and fencing will be removed. The two-car garage will be relocated and embedded into the hill.
- They presented the plans to the neighbors and got some feedback.
- They are asking a lot in terms of the FAR and she noted there were homes in the neighborhood with more square footage.
- The plan was submitted to the historic architect and it complies with all ten of the requirements under CEQA.
- They are trying to make this house work better for a modern family.
- They removed the roof over the two terraces to reduce the bulk.
- The Historic Preservation Board noted the back of the house has no visual interest. The plan adds two windows, one of which pops out to add some visual relief along with the contours of the roof.
- They are removing the chimney.
- There are two distinct slopes to the property.
- The roof leaks in the living room, bathroom, and kitchen and all the doors need to be refurbished.
- All the windows are covered in lead and have asbestos on the outside. This has to be cleaned out. The side porch is rotting.
- They want to maintain the character of the house.

Eric, Acacia Avenue, made the following comments:

- This is an enormous project that will take a lot of time, energy, and money.
- They should be given some flexibility and accommodation from the Commission.
- He supports the plan enthusiastically!

Hillary Culhane made the following comments:

- She lives at the corner of Pepper and Elm.
- She has always admired the house.
- She is glad the house will be "brought back to life".
- It will be a jewel for the neighborhood.
- She supported the project.

Mr. Mike Folk, Elm Avenue, made the following comments:

- He has a unique perspective. He developed 215 Alexander Avenue.

- Refurbishing this house will take a lot of work and these owners are willing to put in the time, effort, and resources.
- The FAR is high, in part due to the master suite and family room.
- The findings can be made. This house is one of a kind.
- This is a solid design, and he urged the Commission not to “fiddle with it”.

Mr. Andrew Sorbin made the following comments:

- He worked with the applicants on the design of the house.
- The front of the house will remain intact and be “refreshed”. The changes will be to the back part of the house.

Chair Tauber closed the Public Hearing.

Commissioner Wagstaff provided the following comments:

- The house is wonderfully quirky with a lot of “ups and downs”.
- It is an interesting piece of architecture.
- The FAR seemed too high but he has come around to supporting it.
- He would like to see a little more detailing on the Alexander Avenue side.
- He can support the project as is.

Commissioner Kunstler provided the following comments:

- He cannot find any objection to the programmatic aspects or aesthetics of the project.
- He understood what they are trying to achieve.
- The amount of work is daunting.
- The house as it currently exists is barely habitable.
- He is glad the City of Larkspur is not losing this wonderful resource.
- He can live with the FAR and massing on the Alexander Avenue side.
- The lot is wedge shaped and constrains the rear of the property.
- The south side of the house is distant from the street.
- He suggested they recess bedroom number four by a foot or two.
- He could support the project.
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Commissioner Swisher provided the following comments:

- The architectural plans are beautiful.
- They put a lot of effort into fine details.
- This house will need a lot of work. It will be a labor of love.
- He understood the concerns about the massing from the front side.
- He is looking forward to seeing the finished project.
- He can support it.

Commissioner Chalmers provided the following comments:

- She agreed with the other Commissioners.
- They put a lot of effort and consideration into the project.
- She likes what they are planning.
- She wanted to make sure there is some separation between the subject property and 12 Loma Vista and is glad the existing tree line will remain.

Chair Tauber provided the following comments:

- She appreciates everything the applicants are trying to do for their family and the City.
- She is troubled by the massing and the FAR and might not be able to get over it.
- It is a lot of house for this lot.

Commissioner Swisher provided the following comments:

- He thought it was far enough from the street to minimize the massing.
- Removal of the fence will make the property look more cohesive.
- This is an unusual lot and the FAR was not that out of scale with others in the neighborhood.
- He liked the floor plan.

Commissioner Wagstaff provided the following comments:

- He thought there were ways to tweak the architecture that would provide more interesting detail from Alexander Avenue and from the uphill neighbor.
- He did not want to nitpick what somebody else is trying to do.
- He did not have a problem with the FAR since it would not be visible.
- He agreed with the comment about stepping back bedroom number four.

Mr. Svengros provided the following comments:

- Stepping in the upstairs would make the hallway not useful. The office cannot be stepped back.
- The bedroom is set up to maximize the light and the French doors.
- They pushed in the terrace wall and the bathroom.
- They want what is best for the house.

M/s, Wagstaff/Kunstler, motioned and the Commission voted 4-1 (Chair Tauber voted no) to approve H/DR/FAR/V/SUP #19-38, 8 Loma Vista to subject to the findings and conditions set forth in the staff report.

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

Senior Planner Teiche stated the application would need to come back to the next meeting for approval of the findings.

## **BUSINESS ITEMS**

### **1. Approval of the October 13, 2020 draft meeting minutes**

M/s, Swisher/Kunstler, motioned and the Commission voted 3-0-2 (Chalmers and Wagstaff abstained) to approve the minutes from the meeting of October 13, 2020 meeting as submitted.

### **2. Planning Commissioners Reports**

There were no reports.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:01 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 November 10, 2020.



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Kristin Teiche, Senior Planner