

ARKIN · TILT ARCHITECTS
Ecological Planning & Design



September 7, 2010

Albany City Council
Albany City Hall
1000 San Pablo Ave.
Albany CA 94706

RE: Appeal to City Council to overturn Planning Commission decision of June 8, 2010 regarding a Remodel & Addition for Heidi & Manny Lopez at 913 Carmel Ave, Albany, CA 94706

Dear Council members:

We ask that the City Council uphold the unanimous decision of the Planning & Zoning Commission referenced above. A Project Narrative is attached that describes the project in greater detail, but in summary:

- The proposed addition is consistent with Planning and Zoning Regulations.
- The proposed addition is consistent with the intent of the Design Review Guidelines.
- The proposed addition is modest in scale.
- Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of .5 is nearly 10% less than .55 maximum.
- The new addition is set back about 35 feet from the rear property line.
- The maximum proposed height is 3'-8" below the height limit.
- A second story at the front would have a large, looming presence on street, or, if located along the north side of the house, it would have significant impact on the solar access of the neighbor to the north.
- Albany has no view ordinance.
- The remodel improves the existing relationship of the windows relative to the South neighbors'.

In the interest of moving this project forward and maintaining the precedents set by other similar modest additions in Albany, we would ask that the Council uphold the decision of the planning commission allowing Heidi and Manny Lopez to proceed with the project per the Planning and Zoning Commission's direction.

Thank you for your consideration,

Anni Tilt
Principal, Arkin Tilt Architects



ARKIN · TILT ARCHITECTS

Ecological Planning & Design

Project Narrative 913 Carmel Ave Addition and Remodel

This narrative, as well as the diagrams and context images provided, seek to familiarize the Council with the project, while speaking to the appropriate nature of the design for this site.

The proposed addition is not only consistent with planning and zoning regulations, it has been designed carefully to minimize the impact on the surrounding neighbors, fit into the existing street, conform with the intent of the Design Guidelines, and build as sustainably as possible.

Our clients, with 4 growing children, need to expand their 1548 sf Albany home. They have meticulously kept up their home, like the way it looks from the street, and similarly love their back yard. Placing added bedrooms to the rear of the house allows the look from the street to remain practically unchanged while opening the house up to the garden to the east, and the sun to the south. Like many homes in Albany, the current house has a different form away from the street, and new volumes that reflect the owner's preference for contemporary design are articulated with different materials to complement the existing form.

The second-story addition opens up to the south with high windows bringing winter light and passive solar gain deep into the space. The added upper floor shades the ground level in summer and is supported on new posts so the existing foundation can remain. Above, roof overhangs and shading devices control summer sun. A narrow bay brings north light to the second bedroom upstairs and provides a good location for roof-mounted solar hot water panels. A trellis has been added to mark entry and provide additional screening and shading, and trellised shading devices are repeated on the addition.

The maximum proposed height is 3'-8" below the height limit. As this maximum height is on the south edge of the building, it limits loss of sun to any neighboring properties and will likely provide additional bounced light to the neighbor to the south. At the east elevation, the proposed addition is approximately 23' tall, 5 feet lower than allowable limits at its highest point. At its center, it is only 22' tall, diminishing to less than 18' at the north wall. The north side is also the location of the existing non-conforming setback (3'-10") which is proposed to be extended upward only at the addition, for the purpose of utilizing the existing foundation.

The flat-roofed portion of this house is the preferred location for a second story addition as it is central to the lot, easy to build upon, keeps the addition low, minimizes impact on the neighbors' light and views, and preserves the look of the home from the street. This strategy is employed regularly and with success on other similar properties in Albany. At the front of the home, the existing house is already over 18 feet tall. An addition near the front would require a height variance in order to build above the existing space, as the existing ceilings follow the slope of the gables, and are approximately 2' taller than the rear of the house. Moreover, building in this location would be difficult structurally due to the existing vaulted ceilings, and likely prohibitively expensive. A second story at the front would have significantly more presence on street and would have more direct impact on the neighbors on either side, due both to the increased height and more overlap in plan.

At the south side, the existing home has a generous existing set back which varies - 9'-4" towards the front, 5'-5" at the bay projection, 7'-7" towards the rear. To accommodate the rooms needed on the second story, the proposed new setback towards the rear at the upper level is 4'-7" (7" greater than the allowable minimum). At the first floor level, the proposed setback has been increased to 7'-7" by removal of the bay that projects into the side yard. This opens up the side yard creating a light and airy broad pathway along the south wall with plenty of room for landscaping.

While the north neighbor will unavoidably incur some reduction of direct sunlight due to a second story on the subject property, this design aims to ameliorate that impact, as it affects not only quality of light, but energy performance and thermal comfort. As such, we have kept the second story plate height at 5'-11" on the north side. Within the constraints of code-mandated headroom clearance at the stairs, the roof is as low as possible. And, as the attached section diagram illustrates, the low-pitched roofs minimize impact on the uphill neighbor's views, where a gable roof would have significantly more impact.

As illustrated in the diagram provided, the windows of the existing home are primarily not located directly across from the South neighbors'. At the first floor, the remodel improves these relationships where feasible. Replacement of the dining nook projection window bay, with a single narrow window that faces a blank portion of wall, will improve the privacy in this area. Raising the kitchen window minimizes some window overlap and helps direct view upward. At the existing entry door, a trellis structure has been proposed. While this is the closest part of the new structure to the neighbor, it will increase privacy for both parties by providing a structure for landscape screening. The Lopez's also plan to plant additional landscaping along the south side to provide further separation.

The second floor addition has minimal overlap with the south neighbors house, and the view is directed out the corner. While south windows are important for the passive performance of any home, we are proposing to remove a pair of windows in the master bedroom as illustrated in the diagram provided.

The proposed addition is modest in scale: at 632 square feet, the added floor area is 33% less than the floor area ratio would allow on this lot, and the overall proposed F.A.R. of .495 is 10% below the .55 maximum.

Lot coverage has increased only slightly, aiming to keep the footprint of the building small, minimize heat loss by building compactly, maximize pervious surfaces, and maximize open space promoting a healthy balance of light and air. In order to maintain this space the new addition is set back about 35 feet from the rear property line, about 15' more than is required by planning regulations. Building the addition in the rear yard would compromise this valuable outdoor space and make it more difficult for the living spaces to connect to it, as the added space is comprised of bedrooms and bathrooms.

Altogether, the project does not approach the maximum build out of the site, is appropriately designed to balance the competing interests of the surrounding properties while meeting the needs of our client, and is not atypical of additions routinely approved in the City of Albany.

August 26, 2010

Dear Council Members,

When we moved to Albany 9 years ago we bought a great house that needed a lot of work. Over those years, with the help of gallons of paint, some serious landscaping, and a growing deep connection to our community, this house has become our home. Not only do we love this house, but we love this neighborhood. With the many generations (including 27 children), our annual holiday and block parties, the disaster preparedness meetings, and the general caring for and watching out for each other, this has turned out to be an amazing block on which to live. What has further anchored us to this piece of earth is the fact that 2 of our 4 children were born in the back bedroom.

So now that our 3 bedroom, 1 1/2 bath home is beginning to feel a bit cramped, we hope to remodel and add some space. In our search for an architect with a history of innovative, green design we found Arkin-Tilt. We share a common desire to build as little as possible with great sensitivity to the environment and community. We feel we came up with a design that does just that. With their thorough knowledge of the city of Albany's vision for residential building, our architects came up with a much more efficient use of the existing space, and therefore a much more modest addition than is allowed by code, to well accommodate a family of six.

As we explored the different options for adding on more space, we found that the best way would be to build up. Our tiny yards in Albany are precious pieces of earth that can add so much vitality to our tightly packed neighborhoods. We fully cherish our little bit of outdoor space where we have planted fruit trees, vegetables, and other beautiful plants. We spent two solid summers building every bit of our recycled brick and stone patio by hand so that we would have the perfect place to sit and enjoy the garden. Plus, you can imagine, the yard gets quite a bit of use and enjoyment from the kids and much of the neighborhood. Building into the garden would truly result in a sad loss of beautiful outdoor space, plus it would be plain environmentally insensitive. The option that just makes the most sense is to build up.

We and our architects explored several different designs that would fit our needs, stay within our budget, and be sensitive to the neighbors and the environment. We feel the design we are presenting to you does all of that as much as possible. When anyone builds up on their house, as many have done all over Albany, of course there are impacts to the light, views, air, and privacy of the surrounding neighbors. We felt it was important to design an addition that is not pushing limits, by keeping well within the setbacks, height limit, and square footage allowed. It is through this approach that we have tried to be sensitive to these important issues that neighbors might have.

We also spoke with and listened to our surrounding neighbors about the impacts this addition would have on their homes (except for Virginia Allison at 910 Santa Fe, who has been living out of state for a while: we dropped off a letter with her renters in an effort to contact her. We understand she will be back next week and will try again to meet with

her.) We do have the letter she wrote for the Planning Commission hearing. We've met with our neighbor, Bea, at 911 Carmel, and she has expressed her support for our design and has submitted a letter to the City Council showing that. We talked briefly with Martha, of 915 Carmel, in the Fall of 2009 about our intention to build onto our house. Then in April of this year we showed her our design idea. She expressed her concerns and suggested several other design approaches, which we have considered. We attempted to reach Karen and Phil at 912 Santa Fe on three different weekends by knocking on their door, but to no avail. We finally got their phone number from David Arkin, and got a hold of Phil. We asked when we could meet, he said he would call back. A week later, after no phone call, we called him to, again, try to set up a meeting. He basically said he supports our right to build up, but only if we build the addition more towards the front of the house. He and his wife expressed no interest in meeting with us. These are all the neighbors that own the properties which share our fences.

Before the Planning Commission hearing, when we were up on the roof, putting up our story poles, we noticed that the neighbors at 914 and 908 Santa Fe would be able to see the addition (at least in the winter at 908, when the leaves fall from his maple tree). But we didn't feel that we would be blocking much of a view for them, since we were thinking about views of the bay, San Francisco, Mt. Tam... So we didn't try to contact them. Then Doug from 914 Santa Fe spoke at our hearing with the Planning Commission, pointing out his view of Albany Hill.

When we heard of our neighbors' appeal of the Commission's decision, we felt we should meet with all of these neighbors and discuss our points of view with Jeff Bond present. We finally had that meeting last Monday, August 23rd, after working around everyone's schedule. I had also heard from Virginia 's renter's that she would be back by then, but that turned out to not be true. At that meeting we heard the many points of view about privacy, views, light, air, and aesthetics. Afterwards, Anni, our architect, spent some more time trying to find a design that further takes into account the issues and suggestions brought up at the meeting, while accommodating our needs and staying within our budget. It became clear that as you flip the addition or move it this way or that, it disproportionately impacts one neighbor over the others, and none of the options changed the impacts - which we've already aimed to minimize - significantly.

Throughout this process we have aimed to be sensitive to our immediate neighbors and the greater community. We believe this design meets our needs in an environmentally sensitive way, while it balances the interests of those around us.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Heidi and Manny Lopez
913 Carmel Avenue