



PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

Virtual Meeting
Albany, CA 94706

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 2021

1. CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Watty called the regular meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, March 10, 2021.

2. ROLL CALL

Present: Donaldson, MacLeod, Momin, Pilch, Watty
Absent: None
Staff Present: Planning Manager Anne Hersch
Associate Planner Christopher Tan
City Clerk Anne Hsu

3. EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS

None

4. CONSENT CALENDAR

4-1. Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting Minutes of February 24, 2021

Recommendation: Staff recommends that the Planning & Zoning Commission review and approve the meeting minutes.

Motion to approve the meeting minutes of February 24, 2021. Pilch
Seconded by Donaldson

AYES: Donaldson, MacLeod, Momin, Pilch, Watty

NAYES: None

ABSTAINING: None

ABSENT: None

Motion passed, 5-0-0-0

4-2. PA 20-067 Design Review for a Two-Level Addition at 1248 Portland Avenue

****Contd. From 1/27/21 to a date certain of 3/10/21**** - The applicant is seeking Design Review approval for a two-level addition at 1248 Portland Avenue. The subject property is a 2,500-sq.-ft. lot with a 2-bedroom, 2-bathroom, 996-sq.-ft. house built in 1925. The project scope includes a new staircase on the ground floor and a 2nd story addition to accommodate a new master suite and a bedroom. This results in a net area increase of 563 sq. ft. to the existing home. A new deck is proposed on the ground floor at the rear of the property and a 2nd story balcony is proposed off the master suite. The exterior cladding material and flat roof forms are proposed to match the home. The existing Mission Bungalow style of the home is proposed to remain. This will result in a 3-bedroom, 2.5-bathroom, 1,499-sq.-ft. home with a maximum height of 22 feet. A Parking Exception was approved in 1997 to allow two off-street parking spaces in the existing driveway and front yard areas. No additional parking requirements are triggered under this project scope.



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Recommendation: Staff recommends that the Planning & Zoning Commission review and approve the proposed project subject to the attached findings and Conditions of Approval.

CEQA: The project is Categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15303 “New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures” of the CEQA Guidelines.

Chair Watty and Commissioner MacLeod recused themselves from this item as they own real property located within 500 feet of the subject property.

PUBLIC HEARING OPENED

None

PUBLIC HEARING CLOSED

Commissioner Donaldson suggested the facade of the second-story addition repeat or echo decorative features found on the front facade.

Commissioner Momin believed a small change to the parapet could be accomplished easily and enhance the overall look.

Stefan Menzi, project architect, reported he purposely differentiated the addition but is amenable to exploring the addition of some elements.

Motion to approve PA 20-067 for 1248 Portland Avenue pursuant to the proposed findings and Conditions of Approval with the applicant to work with staff to add variation to the parapet on the addition. Donaldson
Seconded by Momin

AYES: Donaldson, Momin, Pilch

NAYES: None

RECUSED: MacLeod, Watty

ABSENT: None

Motion passed, 3-0-2-0

Vice Chair Pilch noted the appeal period.

4-3. PA 20-054 Design Review for a Second-Story Addition at 1248 Brighton Avenue -
The applicant is seeking Design Review approval for a second-story addition at 1248 Brighton Avenue. The subject property is a 5,000-sq.-ft. lot with a 3-bedroom, 1.5-bathroom, 1,752-sq.-ft. house built in 1940. The applicant is proposing a 486-sq.-ft. second-story addition on the south side of the existing home. The addition is proposed to accommodate a new master suite and one bedroom. The exterior of the addition is proposed to be clad in painted stucco with a hipped roof to match the existing home. The existing architectural style of the home is proposed to remain. This will result in a 5-bedroom, 2.5-bathroom, 2,750-sq.-ft. home with a maximum height of 20'-6". Parking is provided in the existing two-car garage.



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3 **Recommendation:** Staff recommends that the Planning & Zoning Commission review
4 and approve the proposed project subject to the attached findings and Conditions of
5 Approval.

6 **CEQA:** The project is Categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15303 “New
7 Construction or Conversion of Small Structures” of the CEQA Guidelines.
8

9 **Michael Chen**, property owner, reported the purpose of the addition is to create space for his
10 parents to live in the home and to provide a workspace for his wife who regularly works from
11 home. According to his observations, the proposed addition will cast a shadow on the second
12 story bedroom at 1244 Brighton for only a few minutes longer than the existing structure and on
13 the rear of the home for less than an hour. The property owner at 1244 Brighton also expressed
14 privacy concerns due to the addition's bedroom window facing his property. The window is narrow
15 and horizontal and located high on the wall. If necessary, the window can be frosted. As to the
16 neighbor's concern about construction noise, suggestions to mitigate noise are welcome. When
17 asked, Mr. Chen suggested the window trim shown in the renderings is not accurate. There are
18 no plans to modify the chimney or move the existing solar panels. The addition will have clay roof
19 tiles in keeping with the original structure.
20

21 **Brittany Chen**, property owner, agreed to utilize wood windows.
22

23 PUBLIC HEARING OPENED
24

25 **Tshering Shrestha**, 1244 Brighton, advised that his observations indicate the addition will
26 shadow his home for longer periods than Mr. Chen stated.
27

28 PUBLIC HEARING CLOSED
29

30 Commissioner Momin noted the home is one of the more beautiful MacGregor houses in Albany
31 and occupies a prominent location. The ground floor of the addition can be recessed to break up
32 the massing along the street. Alternatively, extending the niche to the roof and using a different
33 color paint on the facade to the left of the niche can make the house feel smaller.
34

35 Commissioner Pilch concurred with Commissioner Momin's comments. The addition makes the
36 house feel a bit long. Vinyl windows are fine if they match other windows, but wood windows are
37 preferred. The City has placed restrictions on construction in an effort to mitigate noise. The
38 high, horizontal window addresses the neighbor's privacy concern.
39

40 Commissioner Donaldson expressed concerns regarding the bulk and size of the project. With
41 the accessory dwelling unit, the home's floor area ratio will be 0.64, and the house looks large.
42 Commissioner Momin's suggestions could make the house look a little smaller. Perhaps the
43 Commission will continue the hearing and allow the homeowners to revise the project. The
44 addition's bedroom window is fine as proposed and does not need to be frosted. In the past, the
45 Commission has added conditions of approval to mitigate construction noise.
46

47 Commissioner MacLeod noted the front elevation is longer than normal, but there is some relief
48 and texture. The only other place to locate the addition is over the existing house, and that would



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1 increase the height and cost. The home appears bulky on the west facade. The hipped roof is
2 an attempt to keep the height low and reduce shading on the neighbor's home. Sound barriers
3 to mitigate construction noise are usually not effective. Wood windows are not durable, and vinyl
4 windows are not attractive. Fiberglass or aluminum-clad windows would be fine.

5
6 Chair Watty agreed with the suggestion to continue the hearing to provide the homeowners with
7 time to modify the project. The addition could be treated as its own rectangular module with its
8 own window and entry patterns.

9
10 **Motion to continue** PA 20-054 for 1248 Brighton Avenue to March 24, 2021 to allow the
11 applicant time to modify the project's design. Donaldson

12 Seconded by Watty

13 AYES: Donaldson, Momin, Watty

14 NAYES: MacLeod, Pilch

15 ABSTAINING: None

16 ABSENT: None

17 **Motion passed, 3-2-0-0**

18 19 5. PUBLIC COMMENT

20
21 **Clay Larson** disagreed with the City Attorney's recommendation for staff to cease providing a
22 Commissioner's written comments regarding long-range planning issues to all other
23 Commissioners. In the past, the comments have been helpful. Commissioners do not lose their
24 First Amendment rights simply by joining the Commission. There were Brown Act violations in
25 that the Commission discussed a topic not on the agenda and the Chair did not obtain public
26 comment.

27
28 Planning Manager Hersch advised that this issue will be addressed in the upcoming Brown Act
29 training.

30 31 6. DISCUSSION & POSSIBLE ACTION ON MATTERS RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:

32
33 **6-1. PA 21-003 Design Review & Conditional Use Permit for a Building Lift, Lower-Level**
34 **Conversion & Addition at 830 Cerrito Street** - The applicant is seeking Design Review
35 and Conditional Use Permit approval for a building lift, lower-level conversion, and addition
36 at 830 Cerrito Street. The subject property is a 5,000-sq.-ft. lot with a 2-bedroom, 1-
37 bathroom, 1,082-sq.-ft. house built in 1925. The project scope includes lifting the home
38 approximately 3 feet and converting 922 sq. ft. of existing crawl space into living area. The
39 lower-level conversion is proposed to include a master suite, laundry room, office, media
40 room and half-bathroom. A 365-sq.-ft. upper-level addition is proposed to include a new
41 entryway to the home and reconfiguration of interior programming. The overall
42 appearance will change from Spanish Revival to a modern design. This will result in a 3-
43 bedroom, 2.5-bathroom, 2,369-sq.-ft. home with a maximum height of 22'-4". Parking is
44 provided in the existing two-car garage and is proposed to remain. A Conditional Use
45 Permit is required to extend the non-conforming northwest walls located 2'-9" from the
46 property line where 5 ft. is required.



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1 **Recommendation:** Staff recommends that the Planning & Zoning Commission review
2 and approve the proposed project subject to the attached findings and Conditions of
3 Approval.
4

5 **CEQA:** The project is Categoricaly exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15303 "New
6 Construction or Conversion of Small Structures" of the CEQA Guidelines.
7

8 Associate Planner Christopher Tan presented the staff report dated March 10, 2021.
9

10 **Ryan Hughes**, project architect, reported the scope of work includes lifting the structure 3'-3",
11 reconfiguring the roof, converting the existing crawl space to living space, adding a front entryway,
12 remodeling the kitchen, and installing hardscape in the rear yard. The project will eliminate the
13 conglomeration of styles and utilize a contemporary aesthetic. The project should not create any
14 new impacts for the neighboring property owner. When asked, Mr. Hughes explained that the
15 sink and countertop near the kitchen will be a wet bar that is meant to be accessed from the
16 exterior dining area. The windows in the downstairs bedroom should comply with egress
17 requirements. The foundation will be revamped with retaining walls, drainage, and waterproofing.
18

19 PUBLIC HEARING OPENED

20 None
21

22 PUBLIC HEARING CLOSED
23

24 Commissioner Donaldson liked the project. The front entryway needs to be emphasized, perhaps
25 through a walkway or landscaping. The amount of hardscape in the rear is too much but not
26 objectionable.
27

28 Commissioner Pilch suggested the front entryway mimic the arch. He preferred a reduction in
29 the prominence of the garage doors, but that may not be possible.
30

31 Commissioner MacLeod appreciated the project. Lifting the house is a good way to add a floor
32 relatively unobtrusively. Extending the nonconforming wall should not create new impacts. The
33 modern design harkens to some early modernist designs. Wood shingles should not be used on
34 this style of house. The entryway is not prominent, but it will be obvious by default. He
35 encouraged the applicant to use all electric appliances. The floor plan is logical; however, the
36 living room is too small, and the circulation space at the kitchen island is too large. He requested
37 a detailed plan for recessing the proposed Marvin windows.
38

39 Commissioner Momin commended the architect for lifting the structure rather than adding a
40 second story. The existing house has character and well-organized windows. The repetitive
41 windows and guardrail along the front might look relentless. Perhaps the form could vary. A
42 trellis is shown in the plans but not in the front elevation. Making the trellis more prominent and
43 integrating it with the decks would create some variation. The front entryway looks more like a
44 rear entry. Using vertical windows similar to those on the upper level could provide a unified
45 appearance and provide better light to the interior. Keynote 1 for the front elevation refers to tile
46 roofing but points to a vertical space.
47
48



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1 Chair Watty noted the submission does not include a formal landscape plan. Plantings and
2 hardscape could be used to emphasize the architecture and entryway. She supported granting
3 a conditional use permit. The Commission may want to include a condition of approval requiring
4 the submission of a landscape plan prepared by a professional. She concurred with
5 Commissioner Pilch's comments regarding the garage doors being more prominent than the
6 entryway. Eliminating a window and moving the door to the left or using vertical windows could
7 provide some emphasis to the entryway. Two garage doors rather than one can also reduce the
8 apparent mass of the garage doors.
9

10 Commissioner Donaldson indicated a narrow, vertical window adjacent to the front door could
11 enhance the prominence of the entryway.
12

13 Commissioner Pilch concurred with Chair Watty's proposed conditions of approval and
14 Commissioner MacLeod's comments regarding all electric appliances.
15

16 **Mr. Hughes** advised that the keynote should refer to the trellis above the windows. He indicated
17 a condition of approval to revise the front entry seems reasonable.
18

19 Commissioner MacLeod recommended the landscape plan reflect the amounts of pervious and
20 impervious surface areas. A sidelight would improve the front entry as well.
21

22 **Motion to approve PA 21-003** for 830 Cerrito Street pursuant to the proposed findings
23 and Conditions of Approval and additional Conditions of Approval requiring the applicant
24 to submit a formal landscape plan and to work with staff on revising the front entryway.

25 MacLeod

26 Seconded by Donaldson

27 AYES: Donaldson, MacLeod, Momin, Pilch, Watty

28 NAYES: None

29 ABSTAINING: None

30 ABSENT: None

31 **Motion passed, 5-0-0-0**
32

33 Chair Watty noted the appeal period.
34

35 **6-2. PA 21-007 Design Review & Parking Reduction for a Single-Story Rear Addition at**
36 **924 Evelyn Avenue** - The applicant is seeking Design Review and Parking Reduction
37 approval for a single-story rear addition at 924 Evelyn Avenue. The subject property is a
38 2,500-sq.-ft. lot with a 1-bedroom, 1-bathroom, 819-sq.-ft. house built in 1933. The project
39 scope includes demolition of the existing detached garage and building a 385-sq.-ft.
40 addition at the rear of the home. The addition is proposed to accommodate two bedrooms
41 and one bathroom. A new side entry to the home is proposed. The existing architectural
42 style of the home is proposed to remain. This will result in a 3-bedroom, 2-bathroom,
43 1,161-sq.-ft. home with a maximum height of 19 feet. A Parking Reduction is required to
44 waive all off-street parking requirements for the property.
45

46 **Recommendation:** Staff recommends that the Planning & Zoning Commission review
47 the proposed project and provide feedback to the applicant and staff. Draft findings and
48 Conditions of Approval are included should the Commission decide to take action.



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2 **CEQA:** The project is Categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15303 "New
3 Construction or Conversion of Small Structures" of the CEQA Guidelines.
4

5 Associate Planner Tan presented the staff report dated March 10, 2021.
6

7 **Greg VanMechelen**, project architect, reported ceasing use of the noncompliant driveway allows
8 the front entry to project into the space and face the street and provides space for a one-story
9 addition at the rear. A second-story addition would raise concerns about privacy and views. The
10 distances between the subject home and the adjacent home were measured building face to
11 building face and do not account for protrusions from both homes into the space.
12

13 PUBLIC HEARING OPENED
14

15 None
16

17 PUBLIC HEARING CLOSED
18

19 Commissioner Donaldson felt the proposed front entrance is a big improvement. The addition
20 echoes the architecture of the house. He liked the project and supported granting a parking
21 reduction. The project does not include removing the concrete driveway, which can be used as
22 parking for a small car. Removing the curb cut for the driveway would not increase on-street
23 parking.
24

25 Commissioner MacLeod concurred with Commissioner Donaldson's comments. The proposal is
26 fairly modest and works with a narrow site. The proposed entryway is an improvement.
27

28 Commissioner Momin liked the design for a constrained site. He appreciated the proposed entry
29 and the location of the trash bins. He supported retaining the curb cut and granting a parking
30 reduction.
31

32 Commissioner Pilch concurred with Commissioners' comments.
33

34 Chair Watty indicated the addition is the right size for the small lot and complies with the guideline
35 to modernize and upgrade existing housing stock. Realistically, there is no off-street parking
36 available on the site. The property is located near transit.
37

38 **Motion to approve PA 21-007** for 924 Evelyn Avenue pursuant to the proposed findings
39 and Conditions of Approval. Pilch

40 Seconded by Donaldson

41 AYES: Donaldson, MacLeod, Momin, Pilch, Watty

42 NAYES: None

43 ABSTAINING: None

44 ABSENT: None

45 **Motion passed, 5-0-0-0**
46

47 Chair Watty noted the appeal period.
48



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7. NEW BUSINESS

7-1. San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Virtual Open House Summary - The Planning & Zoning Commission will receive an informational presentation on summary data from the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan Virtual Open House.

Recommendation: Staff recommends that the Planning & Zoning Commission receive the consultant presentation. This is a Study Session and no action will be taken.

CEQA: Staff will work with a CEQA consultant on a proper analysis of environmental impacts.

Planning Manager Hersch reviewed the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan project, the timeline, community outreach, and public notices. The Neighborland platform hosted the virtual open house. Open house participants totaled 443; 72 users contributed comments; and users spent more than 80 hours on the site. Public participation spiked just after the New Year. Fifty percent of participants visit and live in Albany, and 40 percent live within two blocks of the San Pablo Avenue Corridor. Many people visited the site more than once, and the average visit was longer than 5 minutes. People in support of keeping San Pablo Avenue the same mentioned preserving the character of the community, increased traffic, and tall buildings blocking views and reducing natural light. People in support of changing San Pablo Avenue mentioned increasing the density of underutilized sites, locating housing near transit, and enhancing the vibrancy of the street. Sixty percent of people supported increasing building heights with most favoring five or six stories. Responses regarding ground-floor uses were mixed. As to parking requirements, 32 percent opposed reducing parking requirements. In general, people support requiring spaces for long-tail bikes and providing incentives for bicycle amenities and transit ridership.

PUBLIC HEARING OPENED

Harry Chomsky supported increased density and hoped the Specific Plan allowed development in a variety of sizes.

Clay Larson noted staff has not analyzed consistency with the General Plan. Perhaps staff could conduct further analysis of respondents' residences. Bar charts should not be truncated because small differences appear larger than they are.

Nick Peterson, speaking as an individual and as a member of the Albany Climate Action Coalition, remarked that Albany has been woefully lax in providing affordable housing. Tall and dense housing projects are needed to provide the housing units required in the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA). The City should entertain parking permits for residents.

Edward Fields hoped the data summary would be available for the public to review. He questioned the lack of development projects resulting from the State Density Bonus Law and whether planning efforts will result in increased affordability.

Nico Nagle, Housing Action Coalition, noted the need for new housing in the Bay Area. Density along San Pablo Avenue is logical because of transit in the area. Increasing transit ridership will help achieve climate goals.



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2 PUBLIC HEARING CLOSED
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4 Commissioner Pilch requested staff present information regarding El Cerrito's and Berkeley's
5 planning requirements. Consensus regarding some of the more controversial topics was not clear
6 from the presentation. General Plan amendments will be a part of the process. Changes to
7 single-family residential zoning on San Pablo Avenue will be addressed in the Housing Element
8 Update process. Because of the housing crisis and RHNA requirements, the City has to make
9 big changes.

10
11 Commissioner Donaldson inquired about a scoping meeting and a project description for the
12 California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process. The Commission may wish to identify
13 current housing opportunity sites along San Pablo Avenue and create some by-right development
14 provisions so that the sites may be included in the Housing Element Update. Hopefully,
15 infrastructure improvements will include rain gardens.

16
17 Commissioner Momin was pleased with the support shown for modifying development standards
18 along San Pablo Avenue. He expected the next presentation to the Planning & Zoning
19 Commission will include comments from the open house, and Commissioners will ensure all
20 voices are considered. Design guidelines and standards should balance restrictions with
21 permissiveness such that every parcel along San Pablo can comply with guidelines. Perhaps
22 staff can prepare capacity studies so that Commissioners can determine appropriate design
23 standards for specific conditions. Not all parcels will support tall buildings. An objective of the
24 project is to make San Pablo Avenue pedestrian oriented, but there have been no references to
25 improving the public realm. He wanted to see improvements to crosswalks, landscaped medians,
26 and bicycle connections as well as stormwater management, waste management, and
27 sustainability standards for buildings and the public realm.

28
29 Commissioner MacLeod recalled that the first consultant report did not discuss parking
30 requirements as a policy option. While consensus on many topics is not obvious, he sensed a
31 general support for higher density, higher height limits, and limiting parking. The Commission
32 may wish to schedule an additional study session or receive periodic progress updates in order
33 to provide input throughout the development of policies. He agreed with the importance of having
34 capacity studies and supported higher density, buildings of six to eight stories, and eliminating
35 floor area ratio. Guidelines have to work with the Housing Element and help achieve other goals
36 for San Pablo Avenue. Participants' support for reducing parking requirements is refreshing, and
37 the City should have a parking maximum of 0.5 parking space per unit along with requirements
38 that support active transportation. Permit parking would support residents. The public comment
39 suggesting live/work spaces on the ground floor is a good idea. Increasing the number of
40 shoppers and residents will increase vibrancy and economic activity. A greater range of housing
41 options will support equity goals.

42
43 Chair Watty proposed scheduling agenda items for Commission discussion of specific topics.

44 45 **8. ANNOUNCEMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS/DISCUSSION** 46

47 Planning Manager Hersch reminded Commissioners of the Brown Act training on March 18, 2021.
48



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1 **9. NEXT MEETING** – March 24, 2021, City Hall Council Chambers, 1000 San Pablo Avenue or
2 virtual meeting pursuant to state and county guidance
3

4 **10. ADJOURNMENT**

5
6 The meeting was adjourned at 9:58 p.m.
7

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9
10 _____
11 Submitted by: Anne Hersch, Planning Manager
12

13 _____
14 Jeff Bond, Community Development Director

DRAFT