



**CITY OF SOUTH PASADENA
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

THURSDAY, MAY 4, 2023 AT 6:30 P.M.

**CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
1424 MISSION STREET, SOUTH PASADENA, CA 91030**

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Nichols called the Regular Meeting of the South Pasadena Design Review Board to order on Thursday, May 4, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. The meeting was conducted in person at the Council Chambers located at 1424 Mission Street, South Pasadena, California.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Brian Nichols, Chair
Melissa Hon Tsai, Vice-Chair
Joe Carlson, Board Member
Samantha Hill, Board Member

ABSENT:

Kay Younger, Board Member

STAFF

PRESENT:

Alison Becker, Deputy Director of Community
Development
Matt Chang, Planning Manager
Sandra Robles, Associate Planner
Braulio Madrid, Associate Planner
Lillian Estrada, Administrative Secretary

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Majority vote of the Board to proceed with Board business.

Chair Nichols asked if Board Members or Staff had any changes to the Agenda. There were no changes requested and the Agenda was approved as submitted.

DISCLOSURE OF SITE VISITS AND EX-PARTE CONTACTS

Disclosure by Board of site visits and ex-parte contact for items on the agenda.

Chair Nichols stated that that he lives one street away from the first project on the Agenda, 1222 Brunswick Avenue. He stated he will recuse himself from this item.

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Public Comment – General (Non-Agenda Items)

None.

PRESENTATION

2. **Updates from the City Manager’s Office –** Deputy City Manager Domenica Megerdichian provided an update from the City Manager’s Office. She stated she was visiting all of the Commissions to provide an update and answer questions. Ms. Megerdichian started by saying that the City had been very busy in the last 18 months as staff had been working on department assessments, budget workshops, and the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan. She commented that Public Works Department will roll out the Slow Streets Project, which would bring elements to make our downtown and residential areas more beautiful and pedestrian-friendly with traffic-calming elements and opportunities to maximize our outdoor business space. She mentioned that various Commissions and our City Council have held study sessions recently on priority areas such as streets and infrastructure, library strategic planning and site planning, and housing. She ended by saying she hoped to see everyone at the upcoming Commissioner Congress on June 28.

PUBLIC HEARING

3. 1222 Brunswick Avenue (APN:5311-007-022), Project No. 2451-NID/DRX/TRP:

A request for a Design Review Permit for a new 2,401-square-foot single-family residence with an attached two-car garage and a request for a Tree Removal Permit located at 1222 Brunswick Avenue (Assessor’s Parcel Number: 5311-007-022). In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption under Section 15303, Class 3 (New Construction of Small Structures, which includes development of a single-family residence).

Recommendation:

Find the project exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15303. Approve the project, subject to the recommended conditions of approval.

Staff Presentation:

Chair Nichols recused himself from this project since he lives within 1,000 feet of the site.

Associate Planner Madrid presented the staff report. Applicant Architect Yu-Ngok Lo and owner Daryl Roberts was present to answer questions but did not have a presentation.

Board Member Hill stated she had one question about the total FAR (Floor Area Ratio) in the basement. She commented that the basement was huge with more 1,000 square feet and asked if that number counted towards the FAR.

Associate Planner Madrid responded that the square footage of the basement was not counted towards the FAR. He stated further that the way the FAR was defined in the Municipal Code was that any floor area that was subterranean and not above the ground level, did not count towards the floor area ratio.

Vice-Chair Tsai asked staff if this property was considered hillside property.

Associate Planner Madrid responded that the property was not considered hillside property. He added that based on the calculations, the property did not exceed the 20% slope requirement to be considered a hillside property.

Vice-Chair Tsai then stated she had a follow-up question. She continued by stating that since the property was not considered hillside property, she believed the maximum width for a single-family residence driveway was 12 feet.

Board Member Carlson asked which material was being proposed for around the garage.

Mr. Lo responded that the material around the garage were 8-inch by 16-inch concrete masonry blocks constructed with stacked bond.

Board Member Carlson finished up by asking why the street address numbers were large like you would find on a retail building.

Mr. Lo responded that they could revisit the size if that is something the Board wanted and that part of the requirement was to have the Fire Department be able to easily identify the address. Mr. Lo reiterated that they could go back and adjust size if necessary.

Vice-Chair Tsai stated she had a couple of questions and the first one was if the fascia material was steel.

Mr. Lo stated it was sheet metal.

Vice-Chair Tsai said her question was about HVAC equipment placement. She noted she saw where the pool equipment was going but not where the HVAC equipment would be.

Associate Planner Madrid brought up the slide of the proposed landscape plan. He stated that underneath the ADU in the back, there were two enclosures outside of the side yard setback, which is to house the mechanical equipment.

Vice-Chair Tsai said she saw the label there for the pool equipment but not she did not see a label for the AC unit.

Mr. Lo stated that there were two enclosures—one for the pool equipment and the other for the mechanical equipment.

Board Member Hill mentioned that she did a quick calculation and the ADU portion of the project was over 800 square feet.

Associate Planner Madrid confirmed an excess of 123 square feet and from his recollection that was included in the total FAR.

Board Member Hill stated she just wanted to clarify that the FAR included that 34% and that it included that extra ADU.

Public Comments:

With no requests to speak, the public comments portion of the hearing was closed.

Board Member Discussion:

Board Member Carlson stated he felt it was an attractive house and he did not have any issues with it. He added that the only thing that puts him off in the rendering was the blue concrete but per the applicant, it is not going to be blue.

Vice-Chair Tsai stated that natural CMU block is usually light gray. She added that it was interesting that Board Member Carlson brought up because on the other side, while she appreciated the style and design and how well it is articulated, her only concern was the south elevation, toward the front. She looked it up on Google Street View but did not drive by it. She said you could see the south elevation when driving down the street and it is a large concrete wall.

Vice-Chair Tsai said she did not have an issue with the concrete per se. She stated that her issue was with the blank concrete wall towards the front

Board Member Carlson asked if maybe it would help if they broke up the concrete with one of the other materials.

Vice-Chair Tsai added to Board Member Carlson's statement by suggesting adding a window to the concrete wall. She added that any added element did not have to be a material change, as she liked the concrete.

Board Member Hill agreed with Vice-Chair Tsai that she liked the concrete and for her it was tough because she agrees with the design guidelines about not wanting large swaths of blank walls.

Board Member Carlson asked if there were any plans for landscaping.

Mr. Lo responded that yes there would be front and back landscaping.

Vice-Chair Tsai asked the applicant if the neighbor's house was single story or two story.

Mr. Roberts responded that it was single story but the house slopes down and there is a basement or a second unit so he didn't know if it was two stories or not.

Board Member Carlson said the proposed wall is more attractive than the existing wall.

Both Vice-Chair Tsai and Board Member Hill agreed that the proposed wall is more attractive than the existing wall.

Board Member Hill stated the overall point is it is a great design, a beautiful house, a huge improvement and she's happy it is going into this location. She stated that these are more just recommendations and that she would be happy to move it forward with a Chair Review but did not know how everyone else felt.

Board Member Carlson stated with the addition, the architect mentioned some possible changes around the window on the wall to give it a little more interest and he would like to see it in a rendering.

Board member Hill stated it could probably be solved in a Chair Review instead of continuing it and asked what they others thought.

Vice-Chair Tsai said she is fine with that unless the Board wants to see it again.

Board Member Carlson suggested a Chair Review but suggested that if the Chair felt it should come back before the whole group that they should bring it back.

Board Member Hill asked if having a Chair Review and then having the Chair bring the project back to the rest of the Board to review was even an option.

Associate Planner Madrid stated that unfortunately that was not an option. He said the options would be to approve the project now with a Chair Review or form a subcommittee, and then have the project returned to the Public Hearing.

Board Member Hill, Board Member Carlson, and Vice-Chair Tsai all stated they are fine with a Chair Review to keep the process moving forward.

Board Member Hill asked if voting for a Chair Review would mean that the project would be technically approved.

Planning Manager Chang stated that it would be technically approved with an added condition for a Chair Review to refine certain elements, for example the elevation plans.

Action and Motion:

MOTIONED BY BOARD MEMBER HILL AND SECONDED BY BOARD MEMBER CARLSON, CARRIED 3-0, to approve the project based on staff recommendation with conditions of approval and an added condition for a Chair Review specifically addressing the south façade, materials and fenestration.

Vice-Chair Tsai invited Chair Nichols back into the meeting.

4. **1411 Oak Street (APN: 5319-006-015), Project No. 2531-DRX:**

A request for a Design Review Permit for a 1,358 sq. ft. two-story additions and exterior remodel of an existing single-family residence located at 1411 Oak Street (Assessor's Parcel Number: 5319-006-015). The residence, after the addition, will measure a total of 4,374 sq. ft. with an attached 500 sq. ft. carport. In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption under Section 15301, Class 1 (Existing Facilities).

Recommendation:

Find the project exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15301. Approve the project, subject to the recommended conditions of approval.

Staff Presentation:

Associate Planner Madrid presented the staff report.

Chair Nichols moved to questions for staff.

Vice-Chair Tsai stated she had one question for her own edification only—not about the project. She stated that she noticed that the staff presentation FAR is 800 square feet less than the architect's calculation of FAR. She asked if the ADU get an 800 square foot credit even when it is under the max FAR.

Associate Planner Madrid stated that the credits that were used for the total would be 800 square feet for the ADU.

Vice-Chair Tsai said she knew the 800 SF was exempt when you have gone over the max FAR. She added that she did not realize that you were still exempt even

if you were within the max FAR so that was good to know. She added this project was under the max FAR.

Board Member Hill interjected that the 800 square feet would not count at all towards any FAR.

Chair Nichols asked if anyone had questions for the applicant.

Board Member Hill stated she had a question about size of the house. She stated that she recognized that the house is on a very large lot and that the proposed design is well under the maximum floor-area ratio but the house, especially in comparison to the existing structure that's there and the neighbors seems massive so she wanted to understand the approach behind that.

Architect Patrick Szurpicki introduced himself. He explained that as part of his process, they look at a 500-foot radius, there are actually four houses in the same range, and a couple that are a little larger. He added that this street, if you drove by, has many big apartment buildings across the street, so there is a mass to that street.

Chair Nichols asked if the Board had any more questions and not hearing any, opened the hearing for public comments.

Public Comments:

With no requests to speak, the public comment period was closed.

Board Member Discussion:

Board Member Hill started the discussion by stating that she felt that overall the project was well articulated and very traditional in the neighborhood with the Craftsman style. She added that it was hard for her to accept the massing and that it seemed like a behemoth of a project. She stated that the existing house was just over 2,700 square feet and the new one is almost 4,700 square feet—2,000 square-feet more. She added, however, that looking at the map there was a range of square footages, there were some other properties in the area approaching that size but none of them, besides the multi-family or commercial lots, came close to that size.

Vice-Chair Tsai stated she did not think, in the analysis, that the unpermitted square footage was counted. She said that the house is actually bigger in terms of existing because it has unpermitted square footage that was not counted in the calculation.

Associate Planner Madrid confirmed that to be the case that any unpermitted additions were not included in the square footage.

Vice-Chair Tsai stated that then the addition is not actually that big because they are legalizing some of the existing house.

Board Member Carlson asked if it was possible to bring up the front elevation with the comparison with the existing and the proposed. He stated he is now looking at it and the new structure is not that much bigger than the old one, it is just taller.

Vice-Chair Tsai stated that she did not mind it. She stated she couldn't remember which zone it was in—Estate, or RS—but it is near a lot of RE properties and like on Milan, though this area is on the other side of Fair Oaks, there are a lot of estate properties and a lot of the houses are quite big. She reiterated that she does not mind the massing and the combination of the multi-family homes too—she feels it is appropriate.

Board member Carlson suggested that the original house was just a big box but that with the addition of the carport, it is more cohesive. The Carport makes the whole thing look a little less imposing.

Chair Nichols asked if the piece of the house concealed by trees on the right side of the rendering is approximately the same size as the original. It actually looks smaller to him than the original.

Vice-Chair Tsai said she liked the design, she likes the project and she has no problem with the size of the house because all of the design elements really break it down and scales it down. She added that she really appreciates the change of the style to make it fit in to the neighborhood.

Chair Nichols stated that when reviewing the project initially he did not feel it was too big. He added that he almost felt like there was a little too much going on with the front façade and he added that he is saying that cautiously since he doesn't want to dial it back too much because it breaks the scale down. He stated there are the two bookend pieces, a middle piece, different roof forms, multiple rafter tails, stair stepping beams that support the rafter tail ridge beam on the front portico, etc.

Board Member Carlson added that these elements break it up, there is a lot of house, and the collective elements make it feel less massive.

Chair Nichols stated he appreciated the aesthetic and felt the design was a definite improvement over the house as it stands now. He added that he liked the look and thought it fit in with the neighborhood.

Vice-Chair Tsai commented that it is a very large property and well under the FAR.

Board Member Hill added that it technically complies but it just seems very large even for that site. She added she is very familiar with the street and walks on it almost every day so she has a sense of the scale in the neighborhood. Board Member Hill added that this just looks like it may be very big and it is hard to see without seeing the neighboring properties. She said it would be great if Staff could

start requesting to see elevations with the neighboring properties next to them so we understood the relationship to the grade, to the neighbor and gives a sense of overall scale.

Chair Nichols asked if anyone wanted to make a motion.

Motion and Action:

MOTIONED BY VICE-CHAIR TSAI, SECONDED BY BOARD MEMBER CARLSON, CARRIED 3-1, WITH BOARD MEMBER HILL BEING NO to: approve the project based on staff recommendation with conditions of approval.

DISCUSSION ITEM

5. 2023 Annual Commission Report

Recommendation:

Discuss and approve 2023 Annual Commission Report.

Planning Manager Chang presented the Draft 2023 Annual Commission Report.

Board Member Hill said she had a general comment, not specific to the Design Review Board. She stated that she had heard in the community that the length of time it takes for approvals for additions and renovations. She did not know if there was a way to improve that and streamline different departments. She did not want to name specific departments but community members say there are particular ones that have held up the process.

Planning Manager Chang thanked Board Member Hill and stated the City definitely understands and that the goal is to streamline the process.

ADMINISTRATION

6. Comments from City Council Liaison

None.

7. Comments from Board Members

None.

8. Comments from Subcommittees

None.

9. Comments from Staff

Deputy Director Becker provided update on the Housing Element. She stated that once the Housing Element clears the hurdle they would be jumping into General Plan Update and Downtown Specific Plan. She stated that there would be two charrettes happening, one on June 3 and one on June 17. She concluded that it

would be a busy summer for Staff. She thanked everyone for their commitment to excellent design and properly scaled urbanism in South Pasadena.

ADJOURNMENT

10. Adjourn to the regular Design Review Board meeting scheduled for June 1, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

There being no further matters, Chair Nichols adjourned the Design Review Board meeting at 9:15 p.m.

APPROVED,



Brian Nichols, Chair – Design Review Board

11-2-23

Date