



**City of South Pasadena  
Planning and Community  
Development Department**

# Memo

**Date:** September 17, 2020

**To:** Chair and Members of the Cultural Heritage Commission

**From:** Kanika Kith, Planning Manager

**Re:** Additional Document No. 1 for **Item No. 7** – Project No. 2349-COA – Certificate of Appropriateness for Front Yard Landscape Design at 1534 Ramona Avenue

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The applicant submitted responses to public comments received for the Cultural Heritage Commission Meeting of July 16, 2020, included as Attachment 1.

**Attachment:**

1. Responses to Public Comments

**ATTACHMENT 1**  
Responses to Public Comments  
From July 16, 2020



1527 Fremont Avenue ■ South Pasadena ■ California 91030-3824

September 11, 2020

Kanika Kith  
Planning Manager  
City of South Pasadena  
Planning & Building Dept.  
1414 Mission Street  
South Pasadena, CA 91030

Re: 1534 Ramona Ave, South Pasadena – Front Yard Landscape

Holy Family hired EPTDESIGN to design a new front yard landscape fitting for the Arts and Craft style our property at 1534 Ramona Avenue. This is the home of our parish priest(s) who are often elderly and we have designed an elegant and fitting Arts and Crafts style ramp to allow access to the home for those less able. We are extremely proud of the landscape design and feel these enhancements will add to the Arts and Crafts home on this property and the community at large.

**The following are our responses to the public comments previously submitted for 1534 Ramona at the Cultural Heritage Commission meeting on July 16, 2020:**

- Comments regarding the landscape design creating a public park: It was never Holy Family Church's intention to create a public park. We did initially envision a more interactive landscape that would encourage the residents of 1534 Ramona, our priests, to interact with our neighbors, but we understand from the many public comments that this is not desired by our neighbors. In addition, the historic conservation consultant recommended reducing the amount of paving proposed, to be more consistent with typical arts and craft landscaping. Therefore, we have changed the walkway to the south of the main entry walkway to a narrower, deconstructed granite pathway. This will provide a safe pathway for the resident and discourage neighbors from entering or cutting through our property.
- Comments regarding fountain and seating: We have provided examples of fountains in front of historic arts and craft houses for reference. The fountain and seating area is intended for the resident to enjoy their front yard, below the canopy of the large existing tree on the south side of the yard. We understand that there is no prohibition from a historic conservation or building code standpoint that would prevent the resident of the house from being able to sit and enjoy their front yard.
- Comment regarding the Vegetable Garden: The design provides for 3 planter boxes directly in front of the west facade of the house for the resident to plant herbs, flowers, or a plant

material of their choice. Again, we understand that there is no prohibition from a historic conservation or building code standpoint that would disallow the resident from having planter boxes in their front yard.

- Comment regarding the landscape promoting the spread of the Coronavirus: We have again removed approximately half of the paved walkway, initially proposed, to discourage neighbors from entering our property. We do not see how the current landscape design would in any way promote the spread of the coronavirus.
- Comment regarding the use of the house as a rectory: Holy Family Church has already addressed the use of the property as a rectory with the city and community. The approval was memorialized in the “Summary of Issues/Concerns and Final Determinations” document issued by the City of South Pasadena, dated November 2, 2017.
- Comment regarding the landscape diminishment of the historic property and out of character with the neighborhood: Our Landscape Architect and Historic Preservation Consultant have both addressed this comment in their narratives and presentation to the Cultural Heritage Commission. Our intent was to be both consistent with the landscaping found in many of the arts and craft houses in South Pasadena and to be ecologically responsible in our approach. Our landscape architect’s design and Holy Family Church’s goals for the project are, to both enhance and compliment the historic arts and craft house on the property. As clarified by the landscape architect and the historic preservation consultant our landscape is similar to the landscape of several of the residents of the Ramona Street historic district, and similar to the recent Golden Arrow award winning landscapes found in front of historic Arts and Crafts houses in South Pasadena.
- Comment regarding the statue: The statue proposed is a standard garden statue typically found in many yards throughout South Pasadena. Again, we understand that there is no prohibition from a historic conservation or building code standpoint that would prohibit the resident from having a standard residential yard statue in their front yard.
- Comment regarding the landscape jeopardizing the neighborhoods application to the Registry of National Historic Places and the removal of the curved walkway to the house: Holy Family Church has engaged a Historic Conservation Consultant to review and confirm that the landscape design does not in any way inhibit or detract from the neighbors application for the Registry of National Historic Places. The curved walkway was found to not be a character defining feature of the house. It was also observed that several of the neighbors in this historic district have removed their original walkways and replaced them, providing a precedent for the removal and proposed replacement on our property.
- Comment regarding the addition of an accessible pathway to the house: At the behest of the resident who is 80 years old, a safe and accessible pathway has been designed on the west side of the property. We understand that there is no prohibition from a historic conservation or building code standpoint that would prohibit the installation of a safe accessible pathway for the elderly resident of this house. The pathway was designed with consideration to the historic nature of the property, by introducing a curved pathway that meets the primary walkway to the house.

## Public Comments | 1534 Ramona

Kyle Cologne 1525 Ramona Avenue South Pasadena

I would like to comment on agenda item #6 (1534 Ramona Avenue): I am quite concerned about the plans to convert this into what amounts to a **public park**. Already, the city has been dealing with how to best control traffic on the narrow stretch of Ramona. The corner at Ramona and Oak is a blind spot, and already a problem when vehicular and pedestrian traffic come together (and an increase in either vehicular or pedestrian traffic will cause problems - and this plan seeks to do both). I realize that traffic (and parking) are beyond the scope of this commission, but there are larger issues at play here that should be considered.

I know from the previous owners that a big problem was people cutting through the property as a shortcut (including those on bikes, and more than just foot traffic). These owners had put up a very tasteful wooden fence to control this, and then the current owners tore this down but some drought resistant landscape that accomplished the same purpose quite nicely. This was unfortunately hastily torn down to make way for the current plans.

I am quite concerned that this plan for a public gathering spot, including fountain, seating, and vegetable garden is not appropriate for a residential property or single-family home. It instead belongs in a park or public gathering place. This concern is heightened by everything with the SARS-Coronavirus2. My wife and I are both physicians, and this virus (and all the consequences of lack of physical distancing) will unfortunately be with us for the foreseeable future. This park is a setup to contribute to community spread of the virus.

So, for many reasons, I hope you will take appropriate action. I fear this planned "park" would degrade the rich history of the property and invite those with little regard for the cultural significance of it to take a quick shortcut through it for the sake of time. Thank you.

**From:** Gabriela S. Berk - Gabriela Sosa de Berk **To:** Planning Comments **Subject:** NO to public garden Ramona #1534 **Date:** Tuesday, July 14, 2020 7:32:14 PM

My husband Andrew Berk and I are not supportive of having a public garden at Holy Family's property on Ramona # 1534

**From:** Betsy Smith **To:** Planning Comments **Cc:** Caleb Smith **Subject:** 5/16 Item #6: 1534 Ramona Landscaping Changes **Date:** Wednesday, July 15, 2020 9:37:59 AM

Good evening, members of the Cultural Heritage Commission.

I am writing to express my concern over the proposed landscaping changes to 1534 Ramona Avenue. As young girls, living just down the street from Marengo Elementary School, my sister and I would rollerblade all over South Pasadena, imagining who lived in each of the beautiful homes and debating which ones we should live in when we grew up. All these years later, purchasing 1532 Ramona Avenue for my "grown up" family was the fruition of that childhood dream. My husband and I could not believe

our luck when we found, not just this house, but this neighborhood for ourselves and our three young children.

It is easy to see why our block, the Ramona Avenue Historic District, is a candidate for the National Register of Historic Places. While so many beautiful, older homes suffer the insult of neglect or the injury of trendy “updates” out of step with their original style, the 1500 block of Ramona boasts a collection of Craftsman homes that have been lovingly maintained with the utmost respect for the pieces of architectural art that they are.

The size of 1534 Ramona and its location on the corner of Ramona and Oak establish the home as the anchor of the neighborhood. Even the unusual angles of the intersection at Oak and Ramona serve to position the property at the forefront, welcoming passersby into our little jewel of a neighborhood. To alter the appearance of the property as dramatically as this proposed design intends to, would not just diminish the stately beauty of 1534 Ramona; it would change the tone of the entire block. The proposed design sacrifices the classic grandeur of this historic home, with its elegant simplicity, in an attempt to integrate the home into the aesthetic of the Holy Family campus.

From the labeling of the building as a “Rectory” on the plans to its concrete pathways, benches, fountain, and statue of St. Francis, this proposal makes no secret of Holy Family’s treatment of 1534 Ramona – a property zoned as a Single Family Home – as an institutional building and a part of their campus. The concern with ADA compliance while in blatant *non-* compliance with the property’s zoning as a Single-Family Residence is a red flag hard to miss.

Not to mention that the smaller, hedged-in garden is labeled as the “Resident’s Garden.” If they intended to honor the only legal use of 1534 Ramona – as a residence – the entire garden would be considered the “resident’s garden.” The fact that the plans indicate a distinction between the “resident’s garden” and the rest of the garden should tell us all we need to know.

One of the hallmarks of Craftsman architecture is its deliberate simplicity, its respect for the beauty of material, line, and – well – craftsmanship. The Craftsman aesthetic is the epitome of the old adage that “less is more.” The expansive lawn that used to border the 1534 Ramona property on its south and west sides served those ideals so perfectly, effortlessly directing the onlooker’s gaze to the home itself – providing the frame, but allowing the home to be the picture. To clutter the front of the property with a vegetable garden (which could easily be located in the unused backyard), a fountain, benches, concrete pathways, and a statue, is nothing less than an insult to the integrity of the home and the neighborhood. It shows either a total misunderstanding of or a flagrant disregard for the architectural style of the home and the community of homes it belongs to.

Beyond the ways that this unauthorized public garden would negatively impact the lifestyle of the neighbors, it is my firm belief that the proposed changes to the landscaping of 1534 Ramona would fracture the architectural cohesiveness of the Ramona Avenue Historic District and jeopardize our efforts to obtain a National Register designation.

Thank you, in advance, for ensuring that this project moves forward in a manner that honors the integrity of this historic property and respects its zoning as a Single-Family Home.

Betsy Smith  
1532 Ramona Avenue

From: Joanne Nuckols To: Planning

Comments Subject: CHC Agenda Item #6, 1534 Ramona Ave-Landscape Improvements

Date: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 10:59:49 PM

Cultural Heritage Commission Chairman Gallatin and fellow commissioners: We support the staff recommendation to work with the Applicant and Architectural Historian Debi Howell-Ardila on the proposed landscape improvements for restoring historic features of the yard. This is the only avenue available to us to insure that our long sought National Register of Historic Places listing is not jeopardized by inappropriate landscape changes to the historic Stimson that anchors our historic district and is the most significant house in the Stimson cluster. Attached are various pictures and historical document we hope will assist you in your determination of the proper landscaping for this site and to add to the city's record for our historic district. First is a picture of the yard before the current owner, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, purchased the house which shows the curved path that has been removed. Second is a picture from the early 1920's that shows the original landscaping listed on the DPR from.

Also, there are copies of the original linen plans which were discovered in the closet of 207 Oaklawn, Stimson's own home. The owners of Stimson's Oaklawn house had discovered all these plans and drawings which sat in the closet for years. One day Joanne was looking at the plans with the next door neighbor Beverly Girvigian and noticed that the drawings look familiar. It took a few minutes before she realized it was the house across the street. Ultimately the owners of the Oaklawn house gifted the plans to the owner of 1534 Ramona Ave one Christmas..."a gift from our house to yours." It was a very special discovery. Last is a copy of a report on the residents. We appreciate the city's advocacy for historic districts and historic preservation city wide. We would be happy to assist with any additional historical information the commission and city might need pertaining to the Ramona house. Thank you for your consideration. Tom & Joanne Nuckols 1531 Ramona Ave (51 year resident)

1 City of South Pasadena Planning and Community Development Department Memo

Date: July 16, 2020

To: Chair and Members of the Cultural Heritage Commission

From: Amber Haley

Re: Additional Document No. 2 for Item No. 6 – 1534 Ramona Avenue Landscape

South Pasadena Cultural Heritage Committee,

Thank you to all the South Pasadena staff for your help with the stop order and for your recommendation to appoint a subcommittee to work with the architectural historian. We feel this is the right move and necessary. We bought our home in this neighborhood that I cherished since we first moved to South Pasadena and started attending church at HFC. I discovered our Stimson home while it

was being totally renovated by Joanne Nuckols. We purchased it before completion, taking a leap of faith that it would be restored beautifully and authentically, which it was.

Our first home in South Pasadena was in the Monterey Hills district. With only one child, we craved more of a neighborhood experience with kids running around and historic homes. We have found that here on Ramona. It is a way of life, we have come to love. HFC purchased 1534 Ramona Ave, which is directly across from our home, after we bought ours, and we were assured multiple times that this equally historical home's character would be preserved. I think the exact words used by church leaders were they plan to be stewards of this historic home. Irrigation was turned off and shrubs were cut to the ground and we were assured it would be replaced with drought tolerant plants and it never was. It has been an eye sore for quite some time. We were assured that it would simply be a rectory and not a place for church functions, and that was not the case. With the recent removal of ALL the vegetation, we were told it was going to be landscaped but there was no plan and no mention of any other use. And now we are told that it's designed to be a public garden. Current and former Ramona homeowners worked very hard on an agreement with HFC to constrain the use of this lot as well as 1510 and 1512 Ramona.

Assurances have been made and continually broken. Clearly the intent is to eventually purchase all of the homes on the east-side of this block of Ramona and transform these homes to expand their campus. While we cannot prevent the purchase of these historic homes that embody the character of our historic village, removing or modifying them is certainly not in the interest of preserving our unique heritage and will diminish our neighborhood. This recent plan calls for a statue, a large fountain, and park benches. The historic curved walkway (recognized in the Parks and Rec Historic Record) has already been removed, replaced by three concrete walkways, which are ADA compliant, further indication of public use.

We have already had a host of traffic and parking issues related to the HFC school. A public space will only exacerbate the problem. So, our fear is that left unchecked, the church will increasingly institutionalize the space expanding their campus despite the lot being zoned residential. Why? Because that has been the pattern. I want to note that the church removed a Stimson home in 1998, formally located at Fremont and Oak and replaced it with what is now the Connelly Center, a very institutional-looking building. Actual plans are not presented, even when directly asked. Changes to what has been presented and agreed upon just happen, instantly changing the character of the neighborhood. We believe they will keep moving towards their ultimate goal any way they can and just bet on the City not restricting them. So far that has been a successful strategy. Though we certainly welcome HFC renovating properties they purchase, they do not have the right to transform residential properties with public use spaces and buildings. -Amber and Patrick Haley 1535 Ramona Ave South Pasadena, CA 91030 626-219-6636 ph

Sincerely,

Shannon Porter  
Director of Advancement