Appeal of DRC approval decision for 15 Loma Alta Avenue

Architecture and Site Application S-19-023

Decision Date: September 22, 2020

1. Introduction:

The basis of this appeal is that the applicant has NOT met the Town's Residential Design Guidelines and that the Town Consulting Architect erred in his assessment of the neighborhood and his guidance to the applicant by recommending incremental changes to a design that was in no way compatible with the Loma Alta Avenue neighborhood.

In this document, it will be demonstrated how the design as approved by the DRC on September 22, 2020 does not meet the Residential Design Guidelines and should be returned to Staff with direction for the applicant to redesign to be in compliance with the aforementioned guidelines.

The Town of Los Gatos prides itself on delivering two objectives to its residents through the robust Community Development process when it comes to residential development – neighborhood compatibility and design excellence. This project meets neither of these objectives.

We ask that the Planning Commission grant the appeal and return this project to Staff with specific directions on the design.

2. Background:

This project started back in 2019 with an original submission from the developer that was well over FAR and integrated many modern steel roof features. The developer is a specialist in modern architecture reviewing their website portfolio. They seem to have limited experience developing in Los Gatos and designing traditional homes with traditional materials.

Residential references from Developer website – no traditional home designs

The Town Consulting Architect first reviewed the project on May 24, 2019 and subsequently on February 25, 2019. Each resubmission by the developer was comprised of incremental design changes to just "meet" the town architect's suggestions rather than taking a holistic view of the project to fit the neighborhood.

The project went to DRC on September 8, 2020 where there was substantial neighborhood objection over the architectural design and style. The project was continued until September 22, 2020 to allow the developer to address the neighborhood concerns. While the develop did meet with the neighbors, there was no compromise on the architectural design as the developer took the position: *"At the end it is important to mention that **"Canon Design Group"** has approved our architectural style and design. "**The proposed design is modest in size and is consistent with the scale of other nearby homes in the area."** This alone should be sufficient enough to not question the design."*[1]

This type of attitude has never been accepted in Los Gatos, particularly when the home is being developed for sale rather than as a primary residence. The developer only wants to quick turn the project and leave the Town with an eyesore.

3. Neighborhood Expectations:

The neighborhood does not object to development of the property. On the contrary, the current home is neglected and dilapidated and in need of replacement. The neighborhood expects a **traditional design with traditional materials** to be fitting with the bungalow enclave on lower Loma Alta Avenue, to have excellence in that design and to use traditional materials to enhance and not detract from the neighborhood. The neighborhood does not object to a two-story home on the property, but expected the design to minimize bulk and mass to appear small and diminutive since this section of lower Loma Alta is all single-story homes. The neighborhood prefers a design in the style of the 10's block of Loma Alta – bungalow style with a low-pitched roof.

4. Failure to Comply with the Residential Design Guidelines:

The following will detail how this proposed design does not meet the Residential Design Guidelines with reference to page and/or section of the Guidelines. Throughout this section the quotation of the design guidelines will be in *ITALICS*.

Page 6: ***Architectural Style:*** *While a wide range of architectural styles is acceptable, there is an expectation that any specific style selected will be carried out with an integrity of forms and details that are consistent with that style.*

The applicant has chosen a Victorian style and massing then detailed this mass with modern features. The applicant has NOT carried out a design consistent with the Victorian style. The applicant has chosen stucco finishes, metal roofs materials, aluminum windows and doors, plexiglass railing and laminate doors. **None of these are consistent details to the Victorian style**.

[1] Bahar Masarati email September 7, 2020 responding to concerns of James Lyon

FRONT ELEVATION @ LOMA ALTA AVE.

***Section 1.4 – Community Expectations**:*

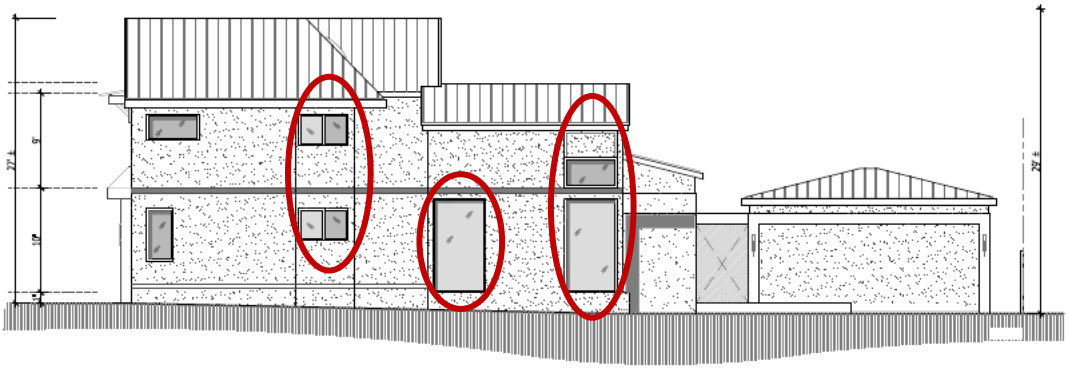
- *Homes will respect the scale and character of their immediate neighborhoods.*
- *Structures will be designed with architectural integrity with design and material consistency on all facades.*
- *Attention will be given to architectural details consistent with the individual architectural style.*
- *Attention will be given to parcel landscaping that is sympathetic to the neighborhood.*
- *Homes will be designed with respect for the views, privacy and solar access of their neighbors*

The applicant does not meet this section specifically that the home as designed does not respect the scale of the immediate neighbors. The home which reaches 28' in height, towers over the 14' home (**double the height**) to the immediate right. Further, the selection of the Victorian style and massing is not in keeping with the character of the bungalow enclave on this portion of Loma Alta.

Secondly, the proposal has no architectural integrity. It is a mishmash of design elements lifted from neighboring homes as documented by the applicants "Read your Neighborhood" submission rather than a comprehensive holistic design. Further, the applicant has responded to the comments of the Town's consulting architect as an incremental fashion to "check the box" on the comments to get the design through DRC. Finally, this is not a 360-degree design as expected by the Town as it relates to design excellence.

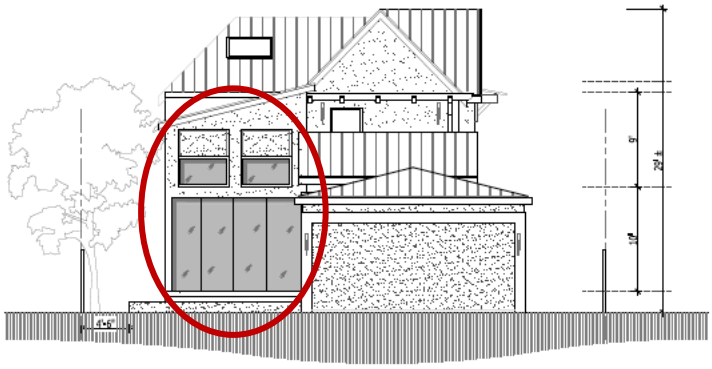
The applicant has transitioned from Victorian forms in the front to Modern flat glass forms in the rear. There is inconsistency in fenestration – placement, types and sizes – throughout the proposal. See the elevations below:

FRONT ELEVATION @ LOMA ALTA AVE.



3 SIDE ELEVATION

1/8"=1'-0"

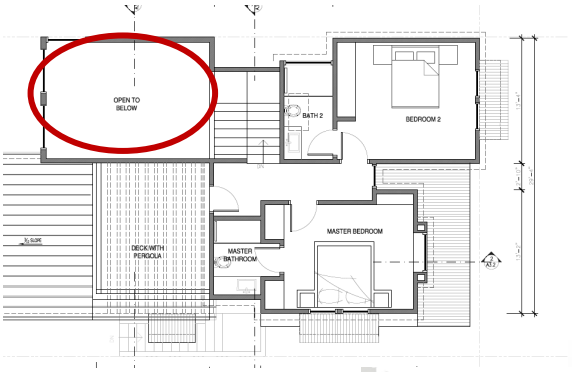


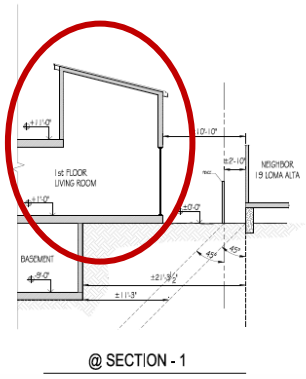
4 REAR ELEVATION

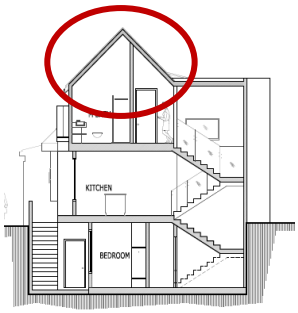
1/8"=1'-0"

***Section 2.1 - General Neighborhood Design Principles**:*
• Residential development shall be similar in mass, bulk and scale to the immediate neighborhood. Consideration will be given to the existing FAR's, residential square footages and lot size in the neighborhood.

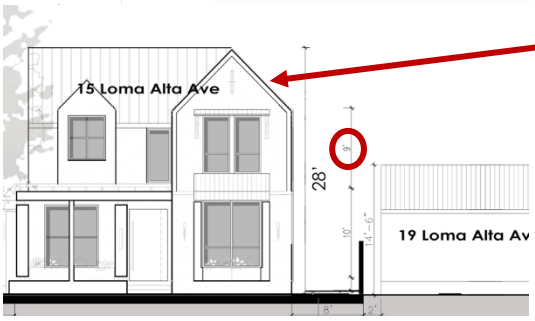
While the proposal is within the FAR requirements, the home as proposed has significantly more mass bulk and scale that the neighboring homes. This is driven by interior elements of vaulted ceilings and open two-story space as well as 9' plate heights in the 2nd floor. Additionally, the use of the Victorian style – 12/12 pitch roof increases the height and mass of the structure.







12/12 Pitch Roof



2.3.1 Design two story houses in predominantly one story neighborhoods to blend with the smaller homes.

Two-story houses may not be appropriate for every neighborhood. For neighborhoods dominated by one-story homes, an effort should be made to limit the house to one-story in height or to accommodated second floor space within the existing roof. If a two-story house is proposed in this type of a neighborhood, the house shall be designed to blend with the smaller homes.

As shown in the illustration below from the applicant's submission, the home is NOT using the roof mass to minimize the impact of the second story. In fact, with the vertical facades, the height of the structure is emphasized, not minimized thus not blending with the smaller homes in the area.

2.3.2 Avoid structures with height and bulk at front and side setback lines which are significantly greater than those of the adjacent homes

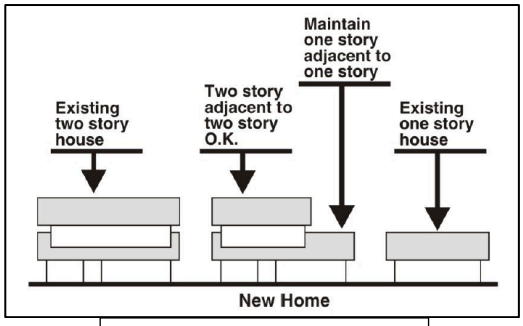
2.3.4 Use roof forms and pitches that are similar to other houses in the neighborhood

The adjacent houses are all low-pitched bungalows – a steep pitch roofed Victorian is not in compliance with this section. The immediate homes are all low-pitched roofed bungalows.

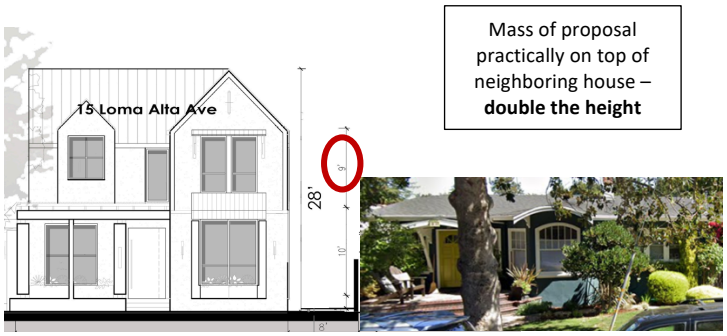
The applicant should look at alternative architecture to better fit the bungalow enclave. Recommendations are to take cues from the existing home – Spanish style bungalow – that would allow for low pitch and parapet roof structures to reduce the height, bulk and mass. Alternatively, a Greene & Greene inspired bungalow again with a low-pitched roof would fit the setting (and allow for a varied wall materials – stucco on the lower floor, shingle on the upper).

2.3.6 Locate second floor mass to minimize impacts on the streetscape and adjacent neighbors

- *In one story neighborhoods, place additions at grade level behind the existing house whenever possible.*
- *Place second story mass in locations appropriate to the height of adjacent homes.*



Guideline recommendation



Mass of proposal practically on top of neighboring house – **double the height**

Proposed design

The use of full 9' plate heights on the second story increases the bulk, mass and scale of the house. The height towers over the adjacent house, not relating to the context of the neighborhood.

3.2 Architectural Style

3.2.1 Select an architectural style with sensitivity to the surrounding neighborhood

The applicant's selection of Victorian form and mass is not sensitive the surrounding neighborhood of single-story bungalows. A more appropriate style would be a low-pitched roof Craftsman style, or Spanish style bungalow taking cues from the existing home – that would allow for low pitch and parapet roof structures to reduce the height, bulk and mass.

3.2.2 Design for architectural integrity

Carry wall materials, window types and architectural details around all sides of the house. Avoid side and rear elevations that are markedly different from the front elevation.

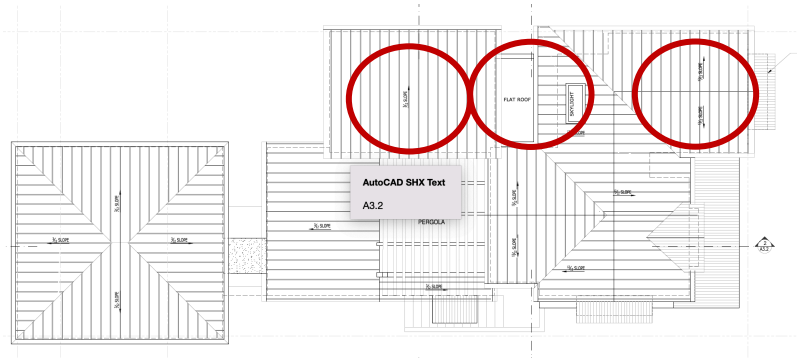
As illustrated in earlier below, it is clear that the rear of this design has no relation to the front. The front tries poorly to be a Victorian design, while the rear tries to be a Modern Contemporary house. There is no 360-degree design that supports architectural integrity.

FRONT ELEVATION @ LOMA ALTA AVE.

These facades and fenestration have no relation to each other – not a 360 degree design

4 REAR ELEVATION

3.5 Roofs
3.5.1 Unify roof pitches
3.5.2 Avoid excessive roof form complexity



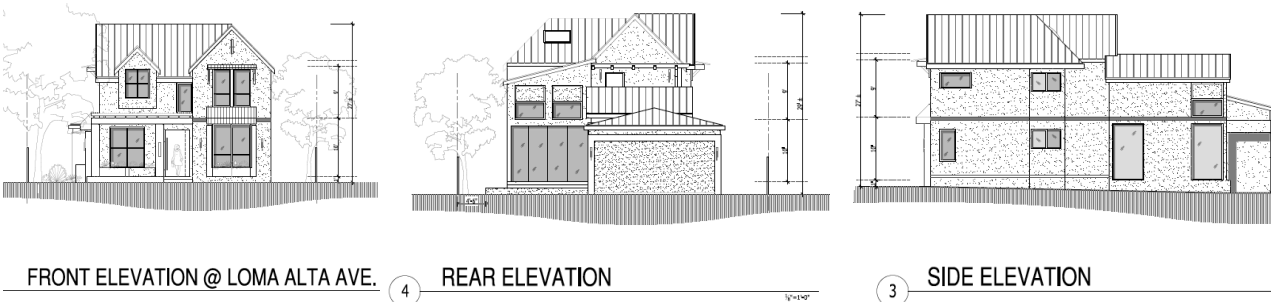
As the roof plan shows, the design includes 3 different roof pitched – Flat, 3/12, 12/12. Further, the mix of peaked roof, shed roof and pyramidal roof structures exist to create unnecessary roof form complexity.

3.7.2 Match window types and proportions to the architectural style and to the surrounding neighborhood

- *Select window types to complement the style of the house. Each architectural style generally has one or two window types that are traditional to the style. <u>Double hung windows, for example, are common features of Victorian and Craftsman Styles</u>*
- *Limit the number of different window types and proportions to enhance the visual unity of the house design.*

The project as designed has a mishmash of window styles, types and proportions. On the front elevation alone, there are 5 different window sizes and styles. As you take this to the rear and side of the house, there this just grows exponentially. There is no consistency in the design.

Further, the neighboring homes have primarily wooden double hung or casement windows – there are no large floor to ceiling plate glass windows in the area.



3.7.3 Match window materials to the architectural style and to the surrounding neighborhood

- *Wood windows are common in Los Gatos. Wood is still the desired choice for styles that traditionally used wood. However, today there are some window materials, such as vinyl clad wood windows that are not noticeably different from wood at a short distance. They may be used if their visual appearance matches wood.*

The project is proposing to use window and door materials in conflict with the architectural style and the surrounding neighborhood. The applicant is proposing to use aluminum windows, laminate doors and plexiglass railings that are in conflict with the surrounding neighborhood which is predominately wood windows and doors and wooded railing details.

In summary, the project as design DOES NOT meet the Residential Design Guidelines.

5. Errors by the Town Consulting Architect:

The Town's Consulting Architect reviewed proposals and revisions by the applicant on May 24, 2019 and February 25, 2020.

In the initial review on May 24, 2019, the Consulting Architect erred in his recommendations to staff and the applicant, setting this applicant down a wrong path to make a series of incremental changes to what was an inappropriate design for the neighborhood.

On page 5 of the review, in the recommendation section, the Consulting Architect writes:

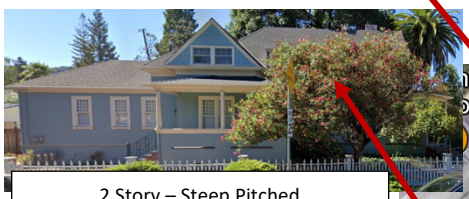
2. As noted in the Issues and Concerns, the use of metal roofing and siding may be difficult to reconcile with a strict interpretation of the Town's Residential Design Guidelines which place a strong emphasis on neighborhood compatibility regarding building styles, forms, materials and details. There is one metal roof in the immediate neighborhood, but no metal used for siding.
Over recent months, we have been seeing a trend toward more Contemporary expressions of traditional home styles. Metal roofing is perhaps the most frequently seen proposal. These proposals have been addressed by staff on a case-by-case basis in the context of the specific neighborhood. <u>Because the forms and scale of the proposed house are very well related to other homes in the immediate neighborhood,</u> this seems like occasion where staff might have greater flexibility in the accommodation of alternative materials.

<u>The Architect erred in his assessment that the forms and scale are well related to other homes in the neighborhood.</u> As has been detailed in an earlier section of this appeal, the home DOES NOT have compatible forms or scale to the neighborhood when compared to homes in the neighborhood below:

2 Story – Med Pitched

1 Story - Low Pitched

2 Story - Low Pitched

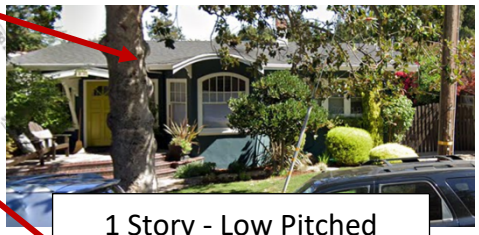


2 Story – Steep Pitched
Landmark Home

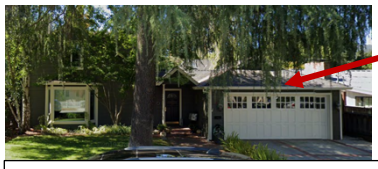
1 Story - Low Pitched

1 Story - Low Pitched

<u>Subject Property</u>
Low Pitched/Parapet



1 Story - Low Pitched

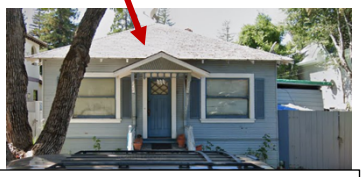


1 ½ Story - Med Pitched

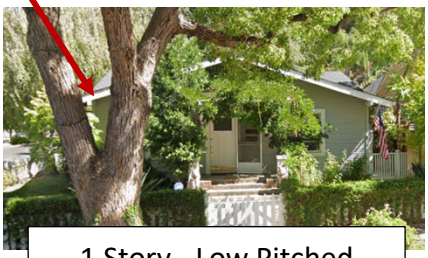
2 Story – Med Pitched
Low 2nd floor plate hts

1 Story - Low Pitched

2 Story – Med Pitched
Low 2nd floor plate hts



1 Story – Med Pitched



1 Story - Low Pitched

As detailed in the prior page, the neighborhood is predominately **Single-Story Low-Pitched** Roof forms. The proposal is a Two Story Steep Pitched Roof form (Victorian). The line of homes on the same side of Loma Alta immediately surrounding the project site are all single-story low-pitched roof bungalows – a bungalow enclave.

While a two-story home is allowed in a single-story neighborhood, the design should be compatible – a two story with a low-pitched roof, reducing the overall height and mass would be more appropriate. Additionally, lowering plate heights and placing the second story within the roof line would also reduce the bulk and mass.

As noted in the Architects review of May 24, 2019, on Page 3:

Tall walls and flat roof in this neighborhood may be hard to reconcile to with the Town's Residential Design Guidelines. Metal roof and siding may be hard to reconcile to with the Town's Residential Design Guidelines.

While the applicant has removed the metal wall panels, they have NOT reduced the overall height (tall walls) nor eliminated the metal roof. There has NOT been a reconciliation to the design guidelines through the design review process.

Overall, the Town Consulting Architect erred on not resolving these fundamental issues at the outset. Instead the architect continued with incremental recommendations to the design leading to the developer taking the attitude of **"Canon Design Group"** has approved our architectural style and design….This alone should be sufficient enough to not question the design."[2]

6. Neighborhood Design Recommendations.

The neighborhood would like to see a modest two-story design that has a low-pitched roof or second story tucked under the roof structure to reduce the overall height of the house to ~24 feet. There are numerous examples of these styles in the 100's block (odd side) of Loma Alta that would tie this project into the existing bungalow enclave in the 10's block.

We have taken the liberty to create some concepts as a starting point for a design that is compatible to the neighborhood. We believe if the Planning Commission returns this project to Staff with specific directions, these concepts may be used for specific directions.

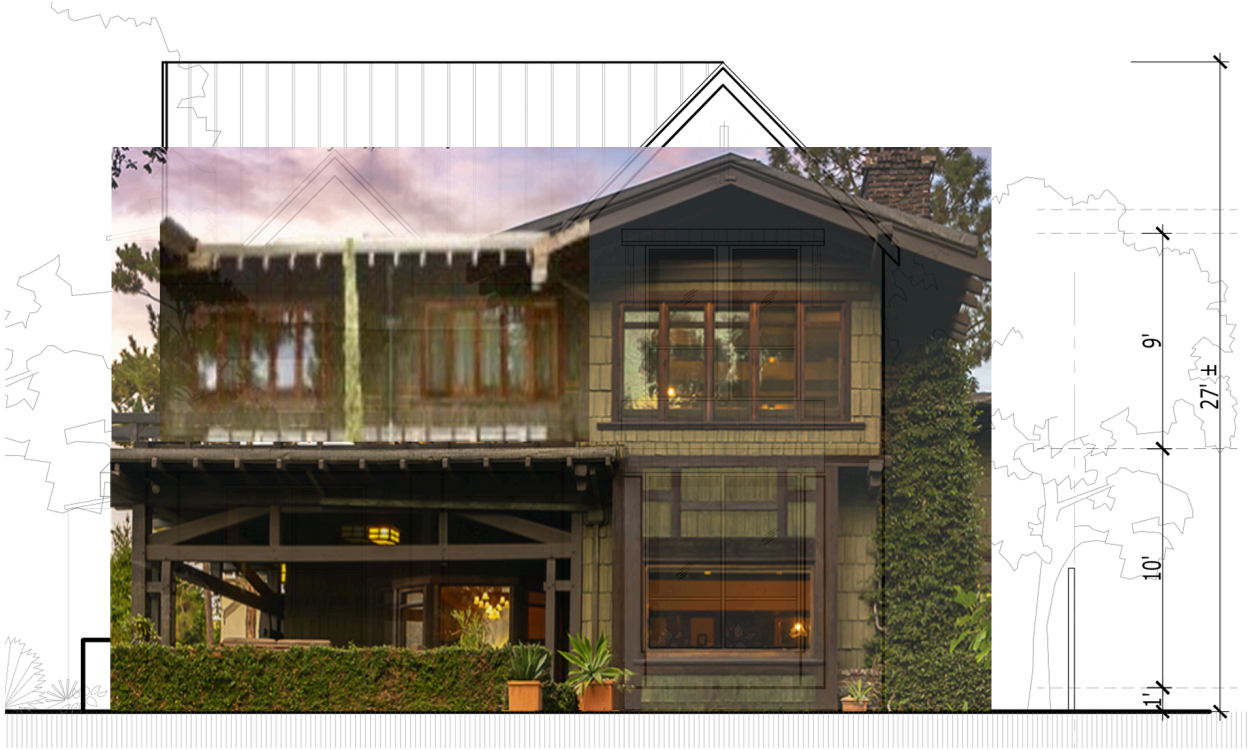
[2] Bahar Masarati email September 7, 2020 responding to concerns of James Lyon

Concept One – Spanish style two story – taking design cues from the existing home

Features:

- 9’ plate heights – achieving the interior ceiling heights the developer desires
- Second story set back to reduce bulk and mass at the street
- Low pitched and parapet flat roof to reduce the overall building height to ~24’
- Detailing taken from the existing home to give a sense of neighborhood continuity
- Stucco siding finish – matching developers desired finished
- Wood windows and doors – to meet the design guidelines and neighborhood compatibility

Concept Two – Greene and Greene inspired bungalow



Features:

- 8’ plate heights on the second floor with vaulted ceilings – achieving the interior heights the developer desires
- Low pitched roof to reduce the overall building height to ~24’
- Upper story set back on left side to reduce bulk and mass at street
- Detailing taken from classic bungalow for neighborhood continuity
- Stucco siding finish on lower story (optional) – matching developers desired finished combined with shingles on second story to capture classic craftsman detailing
- Wood windows and doors – to meet the design guidelines and neighborhood compatibility

- END -