



DATE: February 18, 2015

AGENDA ITEM #5

TO: Design Review Commission
FROM: David Kornfield, Planning Services Manager
SUBJECT: Handout on Commission Role and Responsibilities

RECOMMENDATION:

Provide direction to staff

BACKGROUND

At the request of the Commission, staff developed a handout to accompany the mailed notices regarding the Commission's role and responsibilities. The intent was to better inform the public and to help set the public expectations.

DISCUSSION

The attached handout discusses the basis of the Design Review Commission, outlines the Commission's duties, references the Single-Family Design Review Guidelines and Neighborhood Compatibility Worksheet, summarizes the design and variance findings, invites the public input, and outlines the appeal timing and process.

Attachments:

- A. Design Review Commission Role and Responsibilities Handout

ATTACHMENT A

DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Design Review Commission is made up of five City residents and advises the City Council on matters relating to single-family residential development in Los Altos. Design Review Commissioners are appointed by the City Council for a four-year term. Serving on the Design Review Commission is a voluntary position where a Commissioner's responsibility is to make decisions based on City regulations and plans for the overall good of the community.

The Design Review Commission's main duty is to: review two-story, single-family structures; one-story structures over 20 feet tall; and, variances for single-family and accessory structures. In considering projects, the Design Review Commission bases its decisions in the findings required by the zoning regulations and the City's Single-Family Residential Design Review Guidelines. In accordance with the City's Neighborhood Compatibility Worksheet, the 12 immediately surrounding properties are typically considered in establishing the neighborhood context. These include the two homes on either side, the five across the street and the three behind a subject property.

For Design Review, in accordance with Section 14.76.050 of the Municipal Code, the required findings are as follows:

- A. The proposed structure or alteration complies with all provisions of this chapter;
- B. The height, elevations and placement on the site of the proposed main or accessory structure or addition, when considered with reference to the nature and location of residential structures on adjacent lots, will avoid unreasonable interference with views and privacy, and will consider the topographic and geologic constraints imposed by particular building site conditions;
- C. The natural landscape will be preserved insofar as practicable by minimizing tree and soil removal; grade changes shall be minimized and will be in keeping with the general appearance of neighboring developed areas;
- D. The orientation of the proposed main or accessory structure or addition in relation to the immediate neighborhood will minimize the perception of excessive bulk;
- E. General architectural considerations, including the character, size, scale and quality of the design, the architectural relationship with the site and other buildings, building materials and similar elements have been incorporated in order to insure the compatibility of the development with its design concept and the character of adjacent buildings; and
- F. The proposed structures have been designed to follow the natural contours of the site with minimal grading, minimal impervious cover and maximum erosion protection. A stepped foundation shall generally be required where the average slope beneath the proposed structure is ten (10) percent or greater.

For Variances, in accordance with Section 14.76.060 of the Municipal Code, the required findings are as follows:

- A. That the granting of the variance will be consistent with the objectives of the zoning plan set forth in Article 1 of Chapter 14.02;
- B. That the granting of the variance will not be detrimental to the health, safety, or welfare of persons living or working in the vicinity or injurious to property or improvements in the vicinity; and
- C. That variances from the provisions of this chapter shall be granted only when, because of special circumstances applicable to the property, including size, shape, topography, location, or surroundings, the strict application of the provisions of this chapter deprives such property of privileges enjoyed by other property in the vicinity and under identical zoning classifications.

Your input is welcome and a key part of the decision making process for the Commission. When addressing the Design Review Commission, please give your name and address for the record and use the microphone (if available) so that all those present can hear your input.

Procedurally, the Design Review Commission's action may be appealed to the City Council within 15 calendar days of their action on an item.