

**MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 9, 2013**

**SARATOGA SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING
JOINT STUDY SESSION WITH THE PLANNING COMMISSION
RESIDENTIAL DESIGN HANDBOOK
SARATOGA CITY HALL – ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE ROOM**

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Mayor Hunter called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT Mayor Jill Hunter, Vice Mayor Emily Lo, Council Members
Howard Miller, Manny Cappello, Chuck Page

Planning Commission Chair Joyce Hlava, Vice Chair Mary-Lynne
Bernald, Commissioners Leonard Almalech, Pragati Grover, Dede
Smullen, Yan Zhao, Tina Walia

ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: Dave Anderson, City Manager
Crystal Bothelio, City Clerk
James Lindsay, Community Development Director
Cynthia McCormick, Planner

REPORT ON POSTING OF AGENDA

City Clerk Crystal Bothelio reported that pursuant to Gov't. Code 54954.2, the agenda for this meeting was properly posted on September 4, 2013.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM COMMISSIONS & PUBLIC

None

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS ON NON-AGENDIZED ITEMS

None

COUNCIL DIRECTION TO STAFF

None

1. Proclamation Declaring the week of September 9, 2013 as "Architecture Week"

Recommended Action:

Read and present proclamation to representatives of the American Institute of Architects Santa Clara Valley Chapter.

Mayor Hunter presented the proclamation to the representatives of the American Institute of Architects.

2. Joint Study Session with the Planning Commission on In Progress Update to the Design Review Handbook

Recommended Action:

Discuss the Single Family Residential Design Handbook.

Planning Commission Chair Joyce Hlava provided opening remarks. She noted that the handbook was approved by the City Council in 1988. At that time, much of the City's development was located in the hillsides and now development more frequently occurs in other areas of the City. The Commission started working on the handbook and gained a lot of insights from the American Institute of Architects about how certain design elements influence the appearance of a building. Before the Commission continues on the update, however, the Commission would like to review and come to agreement with the City Council on the findings that form the foundation of the handbook. Planning Commission Chair Hlava then stated she would like to review each finding individually with the Council.

Council Member Miller shared his concerns about the use of design compatibility when reviewing residential home designs. He asked if the handbook would address the issue of compatibility.

Planning Commission Chair Hlava answered that the Planning Commission did discuss compatibility and how compatibility could be achieved without requiring homes to look exactly the same. For example, use of similar set backs or eave lines can help create a sense of compatibility.

Council Member Miller noted that many new homes have tall front entryways and asked if the Planning Commission discussed this type of entry.

Planning Commission Chair Hlava responded that tall or impressive entryways are not eliminated in the draft handbook. However, the draft handbook does eliminate tall narrow entries.

Planning Commissioner Tina Walia added that the intent was to make entryways appear more proportional.

Council Member Cappello asked if the Planning Commission defined neighborhood in the handbook.

Planning Commissioner Walia said that the Commission had a lengthy discussion on the definition of neighborhood and looked at numerous examples from other cities to prepare the language on neighborhood in the handbook.

Council Member Page raised some concerns about the difficulty of defining neighborhood and language used in the draft handbook.

PROPOSED FINDINGS – VIEWS & PRIVACY

Planning Commission Chair Hlava then introduced the first set of findings on Views and Privacy and explained differences between the existing findings and proposed findings, which included three different options.

Council Member Miller commented that he would like the update of the handbook to encourage quality and attractive architectural designs in Saratoga.

Planning Commissioner Leonard Almalech added that the Planning Commission shares that goal and would like to create a document that is user friendly and specific.

City Manager Dave Anderson clarified that the proposed findings offer additional discretion to the Planning Commission.

Mayor Hunter said she was concerned that the proposed findings on Views and Privacy favored builders.

Council Member Cappello disagreed, stating that he felt the proposed findings favored neighbors and allow for greater discretion by the Planning Commission.

Vice Mayor Emily Lo inquired about the interpretation of community view.

Community Development Director James Lindsay noted that the definition of community is in the City's Code.

Cynthia McCormick, Planner in the Community Development Department, read the definition of community view.

Council Member Cappello shared that he prefers the existing finding for Views and Privacy to the proposed findings.

Council Member Page concurred.

The Council discussed the difference between the two options for the proposed findings on Views and Privacy. The Council agreed on Option 2 containing the words "unreasonable interference" a with a detail page added to the Handbook to provide context for the finding.

PROPOSED FINDINGS – TREES, GRADING, NATURAL LANDSCAPE

Planning Commission Chair Hlava introduced the existing findings and proposed findings on Trees, Grading, and Natural Landscape.

Mayor Hunter noted that the proposed findings no longer include language that protects young oak trees, which is a concern to her.

Council Member Miller stated that the second proposed finding might limit circular driveways.

Planning Commission Chair Hlava explained that the finding would allow circular driveways if the lot was wide enough to accommodate the driveway based on minimum hardscape standards.

Council Member Cappello commented that he liked the proposed finding E under Trees, Grading, and Natural Landscape, assuming hardscape is not confused with impervious surfaces.

Council Member Page asked if the language “compliments the streetscape in the neighborhood” under proposed finding E in Trees, Grading, and Natural Landscape would prohibit someone from using drought tolerant landscaping in a neighborhood where most homes have lawns.

Planning Commissioner Yan Zhao said she didn’t think that use of the word complimentary would be a problem; she does not feel something has to be identical to be complimentary.

Council Member Cappello suggested language that would allow for and protect environmentally friendly improvements, such as a photovoltaic system. The findings should prevent construction of an addition or home that interferes with the use of a neighbor’s existing solar panels.

Mayor Hunter returned to proposed findings on hardscape, wondering if the proposed language would allow residents to landscape their yards with rocks.

Planning Commission Chair Hlava said it would depend on whether the landscape compliments the neighborhood or house.

Planning Commissioner Zhao added that drought resistance is one of the design techniques recommended in the design handbook.

Council Member Page voiced concerns that people will interpret the findings literally and feel compelled to match their landscaping to that of the other homes in the neighborhood.

Planning Commission Chair Hlava suggested that the Planning Commission take a closer look at the finding language and come up with language that makes it clear that landscape does not have to be identical to that of other properties in a neighborhood. She then read proposed finding C under Trees, Grading, and Natural Landscape.

Mayor Hunter observed that the language does not protect street trees. Council Member Cappello added that street trees are very important.

Council Member Page said he disliked use of the words “absolute” and “preserved” in the proposed finding. He indicated that the two words created unrealistic expectations.

Council Member Cappello stated that he liked the existing findings and liked the references to the tree regulations in the City Code in the existing findings.

Council Member Page also said he had no issues with the existing findings.

Planning Commissioners Mary Lynne Bernald, Tina Walia, and Dede Smullen explained that the Code references were removed as changes to the Code or number of this section of Code would cause the handbook to become outdated and the Commission felt the existing language read too much like an ordinance.

Council Member Cappello said he didn’t feel it was problematic if the findings reflected or repeated the City Code.

Mayor Hunter said she felt that the findings should include language that protects young trees.

Planning Commission Chair Hlava said that there are protections already in the City Code.

City Manager Dave Anderson clarified that the Planning Commission approached the proposed findings with the intent to simplify language, however the Council appears to be indicating a preference for specificity in the findings.

Council Member Cappello argued that the language on trees warrants less discretion on the part of the Planning Commission.

PROPOSED FINDINGS – COMPATIBILITY, MASS, BULK

Planning Commission Chair Hlava then introduced proposed findings on grading and erosion under Trees, Grading, and Natural Landscape.

Council Members Miller and Page said that they like the proposed finding.

Planning Commission Chair Hlava moved on to the proposed finding for Compatibility, Mass, and Bulk. She noted that the intent of the Planning Commission when drafting this finding was to simplify the language and make the finding easier to understand.

Council Member Miller said that the proposed finding no longer includes language that prevents interference with a neighboring property’s ability to utilize solar energy.

Planning Commission Chair Hlava said that there are protections in the techniques portion of the handbook.

Council Member Miller argued that protections for use of solar would be better suited in the findings portion of the handbook.

Mayor Hunter worried about the implications of the language on utilizing solar energy in the current findings.

Council Member Page agreed that the language on protecting use of solar should be in the findings.

PROPOSED FINDINGS – HANDBOOK CONSISTENCY

Planning Commission Chair Hlava then moved on to the last proposed finding on Handbook Consistency, which she explained simply clarifies the existing finding. After introducing the last proposed finding, Planning Commission Chair Hlava said that she felt the Planning Commission received plenty of feedback from the City Council on the proposed findings and could now proceed with the update to the handbook.

Council Member Lo said she appreciated the work of the Planning Commission and thought that the study session was beneficial. She added that it appears that there will not be significant changes to the findings or handbook.

Planning Commission Chair Hlava explained that the Commission was not trying to make significant policy changes. The Commission's goal was to make the language in the handbook easier for citizens and future Planning Commissioners to understand and use.

Council Member Cappello asked if there would be a separate handbook for hillside homes.

Planning Commissioner Bernald responded that there will only be one handbook, but there will be an appendix specific to hillside homes in the handbook.

DRAFT DESIGN REVIEW HANDBOOK

Planning Commission Chair Hlava invited feedback from the Council on the draft handbook.

Council Member Miller said that on pages 15-18 of the handbook, it appears that the handbook advocates strongly for the craftsman style home. He worried that the handbook would result in use of one or two designs throughout the City and he would prefer more diversity in design techniques. He also observed that the handbook seems to eliminate use of columns.

Planning Commission Chair Hlava clarified that columns would be permitted if they were part of porches and balconies.

Council Member Page raised concerns about the illustrations on page 10 of the draft guide. He thought that the illustration was misleading and ineffective. He thought that this page of the guide should be removed.

Council Member Cappello agreed that the page should be removed from the handbook. Planning Commission Chair Hlava said that the Commission would have to reevaluate how to illustrate the information on this page of the handbook.

Council Member Miller wondered if something could be done to prevent use of flat rooflines for certain designs that would be better suited by different roof styles. He also raised concerns about homes that are not set on their foundation properly and consequently tower over neighboring homes.

Community Development Director James Lindsay said he would look into homes set too high, as this should be addressed during design review.

Planning Commission Chair Hlava spoke about the public input received on the handbook and findings. There are several architects that have participated in public meetings.

Community Development Director James Lindsay added that staff has been inviting homeowners and architects they meet at the Community Development Counter to attend meetings.

Planning Commission Chair Hlava thanked the Council for input on the handbook and findings and thanked Community Development Director James Lindsay and Planner Cynthia McCormick for their assistance.

The Council thanked the Planning Commission for all of its work thus far.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Hunter adjourned the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted:

Crystal Bothelio, City Clerk