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FEBRUARY 6, 2006

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MINUTES

REGULAR PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

FEBRUARY 6, 2006

1. **CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

A regular meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Rolling Hills Estates was called to order at 7:32 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers, 4045 Palos Verdes Drive North, by CHAIRMAN REIN.

2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

CHAIRMAN REIN led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

3. **ROLL CALL**

Commissioners Present: Southwell, O'Day, Vanden Bos, Bayer, Chairman Rein
Commissioners Absent: Conway, Killen
Staff Present: Planning Director Wahba

4. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

COMMISSIONER VANDEN BOS moved, seconded by COMMISSIONER O'DAY,

TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING OF JANUARY 17, 2006.

There being no objection, CHAIRMAN REIN so ordered.

5. **PLANNING REORGANIZATION**

Planning Director Wahba explained that the City Council annually looks at the makeup of the Planning Commission and reorganizes. The Council has promoted Commissioner Rein from Vice Chair to Chairman and appointed Commissioner O'Day as Vice Chair.

6. **AUDIENCE ITEMS**

None.

7. **CONSENT CALENDAR**

None.

8. **BUSINESS ITEMS**

A. PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 52-05; APPLICANT: MR. & MRS. ELLIOTT HAHN; LOCATION: 4 SADDLE HORN LANE; A NEIGHBORHOOD COMPATIBILITY FOR FIRST AND SECOND STORY ADDITIONS AT THE SIDE AND REAR YARDS.

Planning Director Wahba gave a Staff Report (as per written material) and stated that Staff has met with the architect, and the architect has informed Staff that the modifications on the second floor could be made. However, after further review, given the distance between the windows and the neighbor's backyard, there is no privacy impact.

COMMISSIONER VANDEN BOS asked whether the plans had changed, and Planning Director Wahba responded that the plans and silhouette are the same.

Tom Blair (architect located at 1957 W. Carson Street in Torrance) came forward and explained an informal conversation with the neighbor about raising the sills of the two windows on the side of the house to give the neighbor an extra sense of privacy. There was also discussion of making a square bay window as opposed to a 45-degree window.

COMMISSIONER BAYER stated that she was previously in favor of the project and still is.

COMMISSIONER BAYER moved, and COMMISSIONER VANDEN BOS seconded,

TO APPROVE PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 52-05 WITH THE CONDITIONS AS OUTLINED IN THE STAFF REPORT.

AYES: Southwell, O'Day, Vanden Bos, Bayer, Chairman Rein
NOES: None
ABSTAIN: None
ABSENT: Conway, Killen

Planning Director Wahba explained the 20-day appeal period.

B. PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 01-06; APPLICANT: MR. & MRS. KEN SAUNDERS; LOCATION: 5 FERNCREEK DRIVE; A NEIGHBORHOOD COMPATIBILITY FOR FIRST AND SECOND STORY ADDITIONS ON A SINGLE STORY HOME. A MINOR DEVIATION IS REQUIRED FOR DECREASING THE FRONT YARD AREA BY LESS THAN 10%.

Planning Director Wahba gave a Staff Report (as per written material) and pointed out that there were previous discretionary permits denied by the City on the same home. The proposed second-story home is smaller than the one that was previously denied. The architectural design is compatible with the neighborhood; however, the massing is too large for the neighborhood. The home is very close to the street, and the other two-stories are more of a split-level design, where the second floor doesn't dominate the first floor. Staff concluded that the second floor is too large over the first floor. Square footage is not the issue; it's more of the massing of the first and second floor. Staff met with the applicant and the architect several weeks ago to see if there was a way to make the second floor smaller. The applicant felt that wouldn't be beneficial to the floor plan and didn't meet their needs. There's no view impairment and privacy is not an issue.

COMMISSIONER O'DAY asked whether the application in 1989 was the same applicant, and Planning Director Wahba responded that it was a different applicant. COMMISSIONER O'DAY then pointed out the mild sloping area in the back of the home.

Doug Leach (architect at 419 West Torrance Blvd, Redondo Beach) came forward and summarized the elements of the property and what the applicant's goals are. The applicant would like to keep the existing pool and maintain the open space.

Ken Saunders (applicant) came forward and stated that in 1988 and 1989, there were houses that were proposed by the previous owners, and those houses were way too big, by any measure. There is a full second-story house sitting next to the property and another house with a second story from 1971.

COMMISSIONER O'DAY pointed out that the 1971 home pre-dates the City's Neighborhood Compatibility ordinance.

Mr. Saunders agreed but stated that for 35 years this has been in the character of the neighborhood. Mr. Saunders then reviewed other split-level and second-story homes in the neighborhood, stating that two-story elements are very dominant from the street. What is being proposed is compatible with the neighborhood and consistent with what's been done elsewhere in the city.

COMMISSIONER O'DAY stated that the Neighborhood Compatibility ordinance addresses each neighborhood within the city and talked about massing from the street.

Mr. Saunders cited Section 17.62.030(c) regarding scale, which he interpreted as square footage and lot coverage being the main issues with scale and stated that mass is talked about elsewhere.

Mr. Leach discussed a picture of one home on a flat area of Sugarhill, where you see some mass in the picture, not a one-story house, from the street. This project is on a slope with a two-story next door with a ridge height much lower than the house next door. COMMISSIONER O'DAY, Mr. Leach and Mr. Saunders then went on to discuss neighboring homes, different lot sizes, topography and dominance and mass. COMMISSIONER O'DAY stated that the Commission cannot take the pool into consideration and suggested that there's square footage that can be gained from the yard, to which Mr. Saunders expressed concern over the expense of the foundations and the preservation of space required by ordinance.

COMMISSIONER BAYER asked the applicant if he thought this house looks enormous compared to the neighboring house, and Mr. Leach responded that it is bigger but not out of scale.

CHAIRMAN REIN asked whether the neighboring houses would look smaller than this house from standing in the street. Mr. Leach responded affirmatively, to which CHAIRMAN REIN responded that is what dictates the massing. Mass is a derivation of the term massive—perception, not measurement.

Larry Migliazzo (11 Ferncreek Drive) came forward in favor of the addition. Mr. Migliazzo lives three doors down, and Mr. Leach was his architect, as well. Mr. Migliazzo believes that this project will be a great addition to the neighborhood and different neighborhoods are building huge homes in smaller lots. This lot can handle it, and the neighborhood is compatible for it.

Diana Bailey (8 Masongate Drive) came forward in favor of the project. Ms. Bailey stated that she lives in a single-story house perpendicular to Ferncreek. There is a full, two-story house to their left, and they are on a sloping line. The fact that the Saunders house is on a slope will make a difference in the ridgeline. It will be very compatible and is beautifully done. The lot size supports the size of the house. It will be a great addition to the neighborhood. If it is made into a split-level or extended to the back, it might look like a clumsy add-on with a lot more cost to the Saunders.

Patti Migliazzo (11 Ferncreek Drive) came forward and expressed her happiness with her home that Mr. Leach built, pointing out that neighbors walking by comment on it. All of the Commission's issues were addressed and answered perfectly. Ms. Migliazzo also spoke for the neighbors next door at 9 Ferncreek, who are in total favor of the project. The street needs some renovation. The Saunders have waited 5 or 6 years for this, and they deserve it. It is big, but that's not a bad thing. It would be an asset to the street. Sugarhill has done a lot, and that street is looking better and better every year.

Gary Bochino (4840 Ferncreek Drive) came forward on behalf of his wife, Polly, and himself. Mr. Bochino lives one door down and across the street. The flags have been there for a month or more. The height seems to be fine. The design fits into the neighborhood very well. This house is modest by comparison to a lot of the other new neighborhoods. It's a welcome change to the neighborhood, and it's time for a change to allow more modern buildings in the neighborhood.

Richard Berg (4834 Ferncreek Drive) came forward, stating that he has been a resident of the city for 37 years and lives in the property directly across the street. The Saunders are the best neighbors they've had. However, there are some issues. The home next door is built on a slant lot and is a daylight basement, not a second story. Other properties should be inspected by the Commission to see if they are two-story lots or taking advantage of slanted land. The percentage of two-story houses in Masongate would be very small. Some of the speakers in favor of this project can see this house from their house, and some can't. He will look at it straight across the street. The square footage is not an issue. The ordinance was passed after some of these houses were built, and they have different criteria now. There's no way this can be considered compatible. There is a home at the end of a cul-de-sac (11 Ferncreek) off in a corner that almost can't be seen driving down the street. It was a welcome and positive addition to the neighborhood, but what they have here is a two-story house without a massive frontal area. Mr. Berg did not protest when Mr. Saunders brought the plans over, but has since then been overwhelmed by the flags.

Joe Washko (7 Ferncreek Drive) came forward stating that he has lived in the neighborhood for the last 37 years. Mr. Washko talked to the Saunders seven years ago when they first came up with the plans and stated that he would disagree and didn't want a very large, two-story house next to his. Mr. and Mrs. Washko still strongly object to it,

but from a Neighborhood Compatibility point of view. There are 12 one-story ranch homes, with one exception, which is on a grade and is not a two-story house; it is a one-story house with the cellar dug out in one corner. Mr. Washko's lot is a little bigger than the Saunders', and a bigger house should be an L-shaped one-story. They have plenty of room, and there should be no fill problem. The back area could be developed. If this humongous house goes up, there will be no privacy from the backyard, and Mr. Washko didn't move into this city to have that kind of situation. This house belongs on New York Hill (Palos Verdes Estates), not here. This is a ranch environment, and it should stay that way. Ten years ago, the previous owners went through this exercise, and the City disapproved it. This is a ranch neighborhood with horses and a ranch environment, and two-story houses don't fit.

COMMISSIONER O'DAY asked if Mr. Washko would oppose a modest second story addition, and Mr. Washko responded that he'd have to see it, but if it provided privacy and was compatible with the neighborhood, he would support it.

COMMISSIONER BAYER agreed with Staff, stating that the plans are beautiful and very well done and would be appropriate on Strawberry Lane. Masongate is definitely a neighborhood of ranch-style homes. There are a couple of two-story homes, but they stand out as not belonging there. The homes with additions were minimal and set back, maintaining compatibility with the neighborhood. Driving by, it looked enormous and massive and dwarfed the house next door, and it would be imposing for anybody across the street to be looking at it.

COMMISSIONER SOUTHWELL stated that when he drove by the house it was among the most massively flagged of lots he'd seen as a Commissioner, and because of the way the structure will basically dominate the front of the lot, he can't see supporting it in the way it's currently designed. It's not the square footage, just the fact that it's the huge plane of area that's going to be covered by the front of the house, and the articulation doesn't seem to be enough. There is too much massiveness, and the suggestions to bring the second-story massiveness down to a level that might be more amenable are something that should be considered.

COMMISSIONER O'DAY stated that when he read the Staff Report and saw the property, it obviously wasn't compatible with the neighborhood. Having heard all the people speaking in support of it, there is a desire to improve the neighborhood, which he also agrees with and supports. The design, as it stands, would stand out, and it may take 20 years for others to be developed in a similar fashion, so it will stand out like a sore thumb in that neighborhood for a couple of decades. The two-story tower structure in the front and the fact that the entire second story spans the entire front of the house with just a little articulation on the ends speak to the fact that house is trying to make a statement in a neighborhood all about subtlety. It clearly doesn't fit in the neighborhood.

CHAIRMAN REIN agreed with Staff and pointed out a lot in Torrance that now has three two-story houses on the lot, stating that it is possible to overbuild a lot. This is not an extreme case, but the mass of the flagging is overwhelming. It is incompatible.

COMMISSIONER VANDEN BOS abstained because he lives in this neighborhood and knows everybody at the meeting and asked the Commission for more guidance so that the applicant can understand what he needs to change.

COMMISSIONER BAYER responded, stating that architect knows, having done the house at 11 Ferncreek, which is absolutely beautiful. If a two-story can be done so that it fits with the Neighborhood Compatibility and fits in as the other second stories do, it could be approved.

COMMISSIONER O'DAY stated that a second story that is subtle and ambiguous and not clearly identifiable from the street is acceptable, and a second-story is not out of the question.

COMMISSIONER BAYER stated that when you have a project like this going, it's important that the neighbors' concerns be considered and looked at and worked with, and the neighbors have expressed significant, viable, valid concerns.

COMMISSIONER BAYER moved, and COMMISSIONER O'DAY seconded,

TO CONTINUE PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 01-06 TO A DATE UNCERTAIN TO ALLOW THE APPLICANT, RESIDENTS AND STAFF TO WORK FURTHER ON REDESIGNING THE PROJECT.

AYES: Southwell, O'Day, Bayer, Chairman Rein
NOES: None
ABSTAIN: Vanden Bos
ABSENT: Conway, Killen

Mr. Saunders came forward again and asked for an up or down vote.

COMMISSIONER BAYER asked the applicant if he was sure that this is what he wanted to do, to which Mr. Saunders responded affirmatively.

COMMISSIONER O'DAY moved, and COMMISSIONER SOUTHWELL seconded,

TO RESCIND THE VOTE ON PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 01-06.

AYES: Southwell, O'Day, Bayer, Chairman Rein
NOES: None
ABSTAIN: Vanden Bos
ABSENT: Conway, Killen

COMMISSIONER SOUTHWELL moved, and COMMISSIONER O'DAY seconded,

TO DENY PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 01-06.

AYES: Southwell, O'Day, Bayer, Chairman Rein
NOES: None
ABSTAIN: Vanden Bos
ABSENT: Conway, Killen

Planning Director Wahba explained the 20-day appeal period.

COMMISSIONER VANDEN BOS reminded the Commission that the applicant is normally offered the choice before the vote, but it hadn't been thought of to do that.

9. PUBLIC HEARINGS

None.

10. COMMISSION ITEMS

COMMISSIONER VANDEN BOS asked about the Palos Verdes Drive North wrought wall driveway improvements, and Planning Director Wahba explained that the City is working with the resident to comply with Code.

COMMISSIONER VANDEN BOS asked for an update on the 21 Ranchview Road application that went before the City Council, and Planning Director Wahba advised that it had been denied by Council.

11. DIRECTOR'S ITEMS

A. 2006 PLANNERS INSTITUTE AND MINI EXPO.

Planning Director Wahba reminded the Commission of the upcoming Expo on March 22 through 24.

12. MATTERS OF INFORMATION

A. PARK AND ACTIVITIES COMMISSION MINUTES (JANUARY 17, 2006).

B. CITY COUNCIL ACTIONS (JANUARY 24, 2006).

COMMISSIONER VANDEN BOS moved, and COMMISSIONER O'DAY seconded,
TO RECEIVE AND FILE ITEMS 12A AND 12B.

There being no objection, CHAIRMAN REIN so ordered.

13. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:05 p.m. CHAIRMAN REIN adjourned the Planning Commission meeting to
February 21, 2006, at 7:30 p.m.

Julie Cremeans
Minutes Secretary

Douglas R. Prichard
City Clerk