

**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF
THE TORRANCE PLANNING COMMISSION**

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Torrance Planning Commission convened in a regular session at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, January 18, 2012 in City Council Chambers at Torrance City Hall.

2. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Horwich.

3. ROLL CALL/ MOTIONS FOR EXCUSED ABSENCE

Present: Commissioners Horwich, Polcari, Rizzo, Uchima, Weideman and Chairperson Skoll.

Absent: Commissioner Gibson.

Also Present: Planning Manager Lodan, Planning Assistant Graham, Plans Examiner Noh, Associate Civil Engineer Symons, and Assistant City Attorney Sullivan.

MOTION: Commissioner Polcari moved to grant Commissioner Gibson an excused absence from this meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horwich and passed by unanimous voice vote.

4. POSTING OF THE AGENDA

Planning Manager Lodan reported that the agenda was posted on the Public Notice Board at 3031 Torrance Boulevard on Thursday, January 12, 2012.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None.

6. REQUESTS FOR POSTPONEMENTS – None.

7. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS #1

7A. Assistant City Attorney Sullivan announced that recording secretary Sue Sweet had a hole-in-one while playing golf on January 17.

8. TIME EXTENSIONS – None.

9. CONTINUED HEARINGS – None.

10. WAIVERS – None.

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Chairperson Skoll reviewed the policies and procedures of the Planning Commission, including the right to appeal decisions to the City Council.

11. **FORMAL HEARINGS**

11A. **PRE11-00014: DOUGLAS LEACH (DONALD REYNOLDS)**

Planning Commission consideration for approval of a Precise Plan of Development to allow a new two-story, single-family residence on property located within the Hillside Overlay District in the R-1 Zone at 235 Via La Circula.

Recommendation: Approval.

Planning Assistant Graham introduced the request and noted supplemental material available at the meeting consisting of correspondence received after the staff report was completed.

Commissioner Rizzo disclosed that he went to high school with Douglas Leach and he also knows him from church, but he has had no discussions with him about this project and it will not affect his decision this evening.

Douglas Leach, project architect, voiced his agreement with the recommended conditions of approval. He briefly described the proposed project, noting that the second story is pushed back away from the street to minimize the bulk and the rear yard setback is much larger than required to provide a buffer for neighbors to the rear. He explained that the project features a Craftsman design and includes stone veneer and beveled siding that looks like wood but won't deteriorate over time. He reported that he received an email yesterday indicating that the neighbors to the rear were concerned about privacy; that the applicant's landscaper has recommended planting ficus trees (24-inch box) 6 feet apart across the rear property line to create a hedge; and that the applicant would agree to this as a condition of approval and has offered to plant the trees prior to the issuance of building permits.

Planning Manager Lodan advised that staff does not recommend including conditions regarding trees and would prefer that any agreement be a private arrangement between the two parties.

Commissioner Weideman noted that the supplemental material includes an email from the neighbor to the east that also expresses concerns about privacy.

Mr. Leach reported that the applicant Donald Reynolds spoke with this neighbor approximately one week ago and it was his understanding that she was mainly concerned about construction noise. With regard to privacy impact, he noted that there are only three east-facing windows on the second floor, one in Bedroom 2, one in the Bedroom 2 bathroom, which could be translucent glass, and a small secondary window in the master bedroom.

Commissioner Weideman asked about the east-facing window in the office, and Mr. Leach explained that window is set so far back, the only view would be into the neighbor's front yard.

Judy Brunetti, representing Riviera Homeowners Association, voiced objections to the project, citing Hillside Overlay Ordinance §91.41.6(c), which requires that the design provide an orderly and attractive development in harmony with other properties in the vicinity. She related her observation that other remodels in the vicinity are more modest than the proposed 4,298 square-foot house and expressed concerns that

approving this project, which has an FAR (floor area ratio) that exceeds 0.50, would set a precedent. She urged the Commission to deny the project in order to preserve the character of the Riviera neighborhood.

Planning Manager Lodan clarified that the 0.50 FAR referenced in the Hillside Overlay Ordinance is not a limit, it is a threshold that triggers a different level of review and requires additional findings to be made by the Planning Commission. He noted that the grand entry/stairwell area, which is counted twice when calculating the FAR due to the vaulted ceiling, and the oversized garage contribute to the project's 0.59 FAR; that the FAR would be 0.56 not including this extra square footage; and that approximately 400 square feet would have to be eliminated to bring the FAR down to 0.50.

Returning to the podium, Mr. Leach pointed out that the Commission considers each project on a case-by-case basis so approving this one would not be setting a precedent. He stated that he thought it was a key factor that none of the immediate neighbors is opposed to the project and the only issue that has been raised relates to privacy impact and this has been addressed. He voiced his opinion that the proposed new house would be an attractive addition to the neighborhood.

In response to Chairperson Skoll's inquiry, Planning Manager Lodan confirmed that residents within 500 feet of the project were notified of this hearing.

Commissioner Weideman indicated that he favored raising the sill height of east-facing bedroom windows on the second floor to address privacy impact.

Planning Manager Lodan suggested a sill height of 5 feet, and Mr. Leach agreed to this as an added condition of approval.

Commissioner Weideman stated that he would not be in favor of a condition requiring trees to be planted along the back property line and expected that the applicant would do this anyway in the interest of neighborly relations, as well as to preserve his own privacy. He expressed concerns about the project's FAR.

Commissioner Polcari commended the applicant for working with his neighbors.

Kay White, Via Los Miradores, voiced her opinion that the proposed project was not appropriate for the neighborhood because it was too large and the FAR was too high.

Submitting photographs to illustrate, Mr. Leach contended that there were other homes in the neighborhood which appear to be far more massive because their second stories were not set back from street.

MOTION: Commissioner Polcari moved to close the public hearing. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horwich and passed by unanimous voice vote (absent Commissioner Gibson).

Indicating that he was inclined to support the project, Commissioner Rizzo stated that he believed the applicant had done everything possible to minimize the bulk and he thought it was a good project. He noted that projects with FARs that exceed 0.50 can be approved, however, they are subject to a different level of review to ensure that they are compatible with the neighborhood.

Chairperson Skoll stated that he was involved in an HOA for a number of years and also served as president so he's very attuned to what they have to say; noted that he specifically asked staff for confirmation that neighbors had been notified of this hearing; and related his belief that since none of the immediate neighbors spoke in opposition to the project at this hearing, they must be okay with it.

MOTION: Commissioner Horwich moved to approve PRE11-00014, as conditioned, including all findings of fact set forth by staff, with the following modifications:

Add

- That the east-facing bathroom window on the second story shall be semi-opaque.
- That the two east-facing bedroom windows on the second story shall have a minimum sill height of five feet.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Polcari and passed by a 5-1 roll call vote, with Commissioner Weideman dissenting (absent Commissioner Gibson).

Planning Assistant Graham read aloud the number and title of Planning Commission Resolution No. 12-001.

MOTION: Commissioner Horwich moved to adopt Planning Commission Resolution No. 12-001 as amended. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Polcari and passed by unanimous roll call vote (absent Commissioner Gibson).

11B. PRE11-00015: L & V ARCHITECTS INC. (SEAN WILSON & KIRA WILLIAMS)

Planning Commission consideration for approval of a Precise Plan of Development to allow the construction of second-story additions to an existing two-story, single-family residence on property located within the Hillside Overlay District in the R-1 Zone at 109 Via Los Alto.

Recommendation: Approval.

Planning Assistant Graham introduced the request and noted supplemental material available at the meeting consisting of a revised Hillside Ordinance Criteria Response page received after the staff report was completed.

Commissioner Weideman questioned why this project, which requires a Precise Plan of Development, is not considered "substantial" and therefore the one-car garage is allowed to remain.

Planning Manager Lodan clarified that the Code allows a one-car garage to remain as long as the addition does not exceed 50% of the original square footage plus one-third of the garage and the proposed addition meets this criteria.

Mr. Tarrick, L & V Architects, project architect, voiced his agreement with the recommended conditions of approval. He briefly described the proposed project, noting that it features a new master bedroom suite and a four-foot extension of an existing deck to make this outdoor area more usable.

In response to Commissioner Weideman's inquiry about the exterior stairway, Planning Manager Lodan advised that while the Code typically precludes exterior

stairways due to concerns that a residence could be subdivided without benefit of permit, staff felt it was appropriate in this case because there is an existing exterior stairway and there would be no connection from that portion of the house to the backyard without it.

Ruth Vogel, Torrance, commended the architect for not trying to stretch the limits of the Hillside Overlay Ordinance.

MOTION: Commissioner Polcari moved to close the public hearing. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Uchima and passed by unanimous voice vote (absent Commissioner Gibson).

MOTION: Commissioner Uchima moved to approve PRE11-00015, as conditioned, including all findings of fact set forth by staff. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Rizzo and passed by unanimous roll call vote (absent Commissioner Gibson).

Chairperson Skoll commended the applicant for a well-designed project.

Planning Assistant Graham read aloud the number and title of Planning Commission Resolution No. 12-002.

MOTION: Commissioner Uchima moved to adopt Planning Commission Resolution No. 12-002. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Polcari and passed by unanimous roll call vote (absent Commissioner Gibson).

11C. CUP11-00024: DAN WITHEE (RIVIERA COAST, LLC)

Planning Commission consideration for approval of a Conditional use Permit to allow a shared parking agreement in conjunction with the operation of a juice bar within a private training facility on an existing mixed-use property located within the Hillside Overlay District in the C-1 Zone at 129-131 Palos Verdes Boulevard.

Recommendation: Approval.

Planning Assistant Graham introduced the request.

Dirk Thelan, Withee Malcolm Architects, project architect, voiced his agreement with the recommended conditions of approval.

In response to questions from the Commission, Planning Manager Lodan explained that the applicant was proposing a shared parking agreement so that two residential guest parking spaces could be utilized for the commercial component of this mixed-use development; that only one of the guest parking spaces is needed for the juice bar, but staff recommended that both guest spaces be approved for this use to allow for more flexibility in the leasing of the commercial space; and that a formal shared parking agreement is not necessary since both the residential and commercial components of the development are controlled by the same entity.

Commissioner Horwich voiced his opinion that it would have made more sense to reduce parking requirements rather than allotting these parking spaces for two different purposes.

Mr. Thelan reported that he lives in a mixed-use development that has shared guest parking for residential and retail uses and this arrangement works out well

because guests of residents typically use the parking stalls later in the evening, which leaves the spaces open for retail customers during the day.

MOTION: Commissioner Weideman moved to close the public hearing. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horwich and passed by unanimous voice vote (absent Commissioner Gibson).

MOTION: Commissioner Polcari moved to approve CUP11-00024, as conditioned, including all findings of fact set forth by staff. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Uchima and passed by unanimous roll call vote (absent Commissioner Gibson).

Planning Assistant Graham read aloud the number and title of Planning Commission Resolution No. 12-003.

MOTION: Commissioner Polcari moved to adopt Planning Commission Resolution No. 12-003. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horwich and passed by unanimous roll call vote (absent Commissioner Gibson).

12. **RESOLUTIONS** – None.

13. **PUBLIC WORKSHOP ITEMS** – None.

14. **MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS** – None.

15. **REVIEW OF CITY COUNCIL ACTION ON PLANNING MATTERS**

Planning Manager Lodan reported that the City Council considered the senior housing development on the Del Amo Financial Center site at the January 10 City Council meeting and after a lengthy discussion, denied the project without prejudice.

16. **LIST OF TENTATIVE PLANNING COMMISSION CASES**

Planning Manager Lodan reviewed the agenda for the February 1, 2012 Planning Commission meeting.

17. **ORAL COMMUNICATIONS**

17A. Chairperson Skoll questioned whether there was any funding available for Commissioners to attend the National American Planning Association conference to be held in Los Angeles in April. Planning Manager Lodan stated that he believed funding was available for two Commissioners to attend and recommended that an item be placed on the next meeting agenda for further discussion.

17B. Noting that this was Commissioner Horwich's last meeting, Commissioner Rizzo thanked him for being a great mentor and for generously sharing his wealth of knowledge.

17C. Commissioner Polcari echoed Commissioner Rizzo's remarks.

17D. Commissioner Weideman expressed appreciation for Commissioner Horwich's service, noting that he has come to value his judgment and respect his opinion.

17E. Commissioner Uchima stated that he has spent 10 years on the Commission with Commissioner Horwich and has found him to be an extremely fair and honest person with well thought-out opinions.

17F. Chairperson Skoll also expressed appreciation for Commissioner Horwich's service, noting that he will miss his pearls of wisdom and insightful comments.

17G. Chairperson Skoll reported on his attendance at a meeting of the ExxonMobil Community Advisory Panel earlier this evening. He noted that the refinery manager responded to a recent newspaper article that listed the refinery as the third worst for greenhouse gas emissions in L.A. County. He expressed confidence that everything possible was being done to make the refinery safe and in compliance with the volumes of regulations refineries are subject to. He reported on the results of a community survey, which revealed that while people do not particularly like having the refinery in their backyard, they appreciate what the refinery is doing for the community, including the many generous charitable donations.

17H. Chairperson Skoll asked about the status of the Walmart project, and Planning Manager Lodan reported that interior and parking lot improvements are underway and the store could be open in mid to late summer if all goes well during construction.

17I. Commissioner Horwich introduced his wife June who was present at the meeting. Noting that he has spent a total of 19 years on the Planning Commission and several of his colleagues have gone on to become City Council members, he related his belief that the members of the current Commission were the finest group he has had the pleasure of serving with.

18. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:30 p.m., the meeting was adjourned to Wednesday, February 1, 2012 at 7:00 p.m.

Approved as Submitted March 7, 2012 s/ Sue Herbers, City Clerk
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