

**CITY OF MANHATTAN BEACH
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
OCTOBER 14, 2015**

A Regular Meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Manhattan Beach, California, was held on the 14th day of October, 2015, at the hour of 6:30 p.m., in the City Council Chambers, at 1400 Highland Avenue, in said City.

1. ROLL CALL

Present: Apostol, Bordokas, Conaway, Ortmann, Chairperson Hersman
Absent: None
Staff Present: Mike Estrada, Assistant City Attorney
Marisa Lundstedt, Community Development Director
Laurie Jester, Planning Manager
Angelica Ochoa, Associate Planner
Rafael Garcia, Assistant Planner
Nhung Madrid, Senior Management Analyst
Erik Zandvliet, City Traffic Engineer
Robert Espinosa, Fire Chief
Rosemary Lackow, Recording Secretary

2. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION - None

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – September 23, 2015

A motion was MADE and SECONDED (Ortmann/Bordokas) to **APPROVE** the minutes of September 23, 2015 with one change: page 4, ninth paragraph beginning “Director Lundstedt clarified...” to strike “ensured” and replace with “ensued”.

AYES: Apostol, Bordokas, Conaway, Ortmann, Chairperson Hersman
NOES: None
ABSENT: None
ABSTAIN: None

4. GENERAL BUSINESS

10/14/15-2 Downtown Specific Plan Project Update

Director Lundstedt introduced Senior Management Analyst Nhung Madrid who proceeded with a slide presentation, covering several topics in detail. She then concluded the presentation with the staff recommendation that the Commission accept the staff presentation and provide feedback regarding Workshop No. 1.

Chair Hersman invited the Commission to comment on the Workshop. Commissioner Ortmann inquired as to why staff didn’t advocate more regarding the alternatives, and there seemed to be some confusion with some participants on certain alternatives. Senior Management Analyst Madrid responded that knowledgeable staff members were present at each poster to answer questions and assist participants in understanding their choices. Director Lundstedt emphasized that the alternatives are based on the ULI recommendations, the intercept and other surveys.

Ms. Madrid clarified the next step in developing alternatives will be that staff will present the options and preferences from the Workshop as well as input from all of the interviews, intercept surveys and Open City Hall website and other input, to the City Council (e.g. the 2-story height alternative being preferred).

Chairperson Hersman stated her concern that more input is needed regarding the underlying assumptions of alternatives, for example, that by asking how should we increase parking downtown, there is an assumption that more parking is desired by the community. The Chair also thought more information should be presented on how alternatives might be implemented, for example, if we want to limit uses in ground floor offices, how would we do that? Property rights could be affected.

Commissioner Conaway made the following suggestions regarding the report to the City Council: 1) that

staff point out which “action items” can be readily enacted vs. others that involve policy issues and most likely would take a lot of time; 2) that in the next survey, the questions be designed to provide more clarity as to what respondents are favoring, policy wise (for example, linking increasing parking with a result of attracting more visitors); and 3) that it be pointed out that some alternatives may be missing or not part of the conversation (for example, at the Von’s site, would the community want to see some senior housing?).

Director Lundstedt explained, at this point the Workshop results and the Commission’s input will be shared with Council and after receiving Council feedback, staff will weave this information together in developing further options. Staff will be communicating information back to the Council, including some of the community concerns regarding the ULI recommendations.

Chair Hersman thanked Staff for the presentation.

5. NEW BUSINESS

10/14/15-3. Appeal of two Coastal Development Permits No. CA 15-05 (VTPM 73511) and CA 15-06 (VTPM 73086) and Subdivision Maps for the demolition of a duplex and construction of two three-story residential condominium units on each of the two lots, for a total of four new condominium units located at 2616 and 2620 Alma Avenue.

Associate Planner Ochoa and Assistant Planner Rafael Garcia jointly gave the staff report, utilizing a powerpoint presentation. Staff recommended that the 27th Street public right-of-way be improved to widen the street to improve Fire Department and other vehicle access, provide a sidewalk, and landscaping.

Mr. Garcia outlined the comments and concerns of the public and noted an email received today in support of the condominium project. The Staff recommends that the Commission uphold the Community Development Director’s decision to approve proposed project, subject to conditions noted in the written staff report.

Staff responded to questions from the Commission. Assistant Planner Garcia clarified that the sidewalk recommended by Staff will only be along 27th Street and for a small area on Alma Avenue and a new crosswalk is not proposed. Mr. Garcia emphasized that the staff recommendations are based on recommendations from other Departments, responding to neighbors input and staff field observations. Director Lundstedt explained that the intent of staff was to be able to provide a safe area for school children in the vicinity.

Traffic Engineer Zandvliet clarified that many children are dropped off on Vista Drive even though this may not be an official school drop off zone, and 27th Street is used frequently for cars getting back to Highland Avenue, and typically crosswalks are not installed in residential areas at stop signs. He also clarified the General Plan goal is to maintain a minimum 28-foot wide travel area. In this case the Fire Department is recommending that the street drivable area on 27th Street be widened by 4 feet (increasing from 20 to 24 feet including parking on the south side of the street) to improve fire truck access and to install a 4-foot sidewalk plus 2 feet of landscaping, with ADA ramps at the corners. With a new walkway on Alma Avenue, pedestrian access will be provided all the way from Vista Drive to Alma Avenue.

Commissioner Ortmann expressed his concerns with street widening, noting that narrower streets encourage slower traffic and requiring widening may set an undesirable precedent.

Mr. Garcia explained that development has not required setbacks larger than 15 feet from the road centerline at the ground floor on Vista Drive, or similar alleys, and to his knowledge, no condominiums have been denied in this area. It was clarified that in this case Vista Drive includes a walkway on the east side, defined by a white edgeline. Mr. Garcia confirmed that the sidewalk being proposed would extend the entire length of 27th Street ending at a small walkway along Alma.

Elizabeth Srour, representing the developer, reviewed the application related to zoning and coastal requirements and emphasized that the project is in full compliance with the Code, including providing a third guest parking space for each unit. She was not aware of any condos being denied nearby and indicated the project is a housing ownership opportunity. When the Director initially approved the application, no special conditions were imposed, because there were no formal policies in place. Ms. Srour concluded that the developer requests approval based on the original approval by the Community Development Director, without any additional special conditions for improvements to the 27th Street public-right-of-way.

Howard Crabtree, project architect, noted that there will be only a net increase of one driveway on Vista Drive. He detailed the project access and setbacks, and public right-of-way conditions around the corner site.

Matt Morris, owner of the development project, has built homes for the last 21 years including eight other

condominiums on Alma Avenue, knows the area well, and believes he has made a positive impact. Before buying the property he considered how the right-of-way would be treated and believes having more landscaping and improving the “neighborhood feel” is preferable, and the issue of providing a sidewalk seems to have come up at the last minute.

Chair Hersman invited the Appellants to address the Commission.

Hugh Kretschmer, 420 27th Street, commented that a safe pedestrian zone exists on Vista Drive and he is very concerned that neighborhood safety, particularly for the Grandview Elementary School children, will be hampered by potentially six more cars backing out of new driveways into Vista Drive. He said they have no dispute with the City or developer, and are not asking for a new policy but to look carefully at this particular corner because its location and conditions warrant a special look. He concluded that they are asking that the corner project be “downsized” to make the area safer. Mr. Kretschmer responded to Commissioner Ortmann’s question that perhaps the solution is to build one unit on the corner and he thinks the site has been used historically as a single home.

PUBLIC INPUT

Chair Hersman invited public comments.

Richard Neff, lives across from the appellant. He agrees with the applicant regarding the sidewalk but agrees with the appellant that the area will be more congested. It seems like the sidewalk will go to “nowhere” and doesn’t make sense, and generally the level of density in the area has undercut the quality of life in this area with way too much traffic on Highland Avenue and Alma Avenue, and with buildings filling up each lot this eliminates light, air and view. He believes that this neighborhood should be single family residences.

Jim Burton, lives on 11th Street, and has a business partner who lives nearby. His only comment is about the sidewalk and believes that while there is a concern for safety, he doesn’t think this is a good solution.

Gary Brugman, 416 27 St, supports the appellant.

Chair Hersman invited Commission discussion.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

Commission discussion followed: widening at the corners of 27th Street is favored (Bordokas); the community should continue to be “walkable”; the City should address crosswalks consistently; the conditions at 27th Street although unique, are similar to other streets to the north; garages on the alley are not a major problem, because both pedestrians and building occupants know to look out for each other (Conaway); that the Planning Commission does not have the option to deny the project; the project is supported as designed, but suggested maybe there is some tweaking that can be done to enhance safety, noting that he observed that cars turning left from Vista Drive to 27th Street have very little room to maneuver (Apostol).

Traffic Engineer Zandvliet clarified that the staff recommendation for the “bulb-outs” at the corners is intended to protect an existing utility pole and fire hydrant while creating better visibility and more street space without any loss in street parking spaces. Chair Hersman observed that cars will not be parked so far into the roadway, so congestion would be relieved.

Lengthy discussion followed on the issue of possible treatment of 27th Street and whether to support the first site plan as originally approved or as now recommended by Staff. Concern was voiced that the staff recommendation puts cars, not people, first and this will impact the feeling of the area, with more pavement, and less landscaping. There was discussion that a broader policy might be needed before requiring a 4-foot sidewalk (Ortmann).

Director Lundstedt advised that this was thought to be a site that warranted a closer look pursuant to the appeal. The Director of Public Works does have the authority to require improvements in the street right-of-way and the recommendations for the special conditions address public concerns and safety issues.

Further Commission discussion followed: the left turn issue onto 27th Street is a serious issue that should be addressed (Bordokas); perhaps the School Board should be involved as this involves student safety (Hersman); by facilitating traffic vehicle, speeds may increase and hard improvements will “chip away” at the neighborhood fabric and widening is not favored (Ortmann and Conaway); regarding corner visibility, parking should be restricted with red painted areas consistent with the adjacent intersections (Conaway).

Fire Chief Robert Espinosa stated that while the current Fire Code calls for an even wider street width (32-ft), which would include parking on one side of the street, he understands the issues concerning the beauty and character of the street. He emphasized that the requirement has to do with the size of their vehicles - they can't get shorter or smaller vehicles and they also must be able to accommodate fire trucks from other jurisdictions when needed. The minimum space needed to set up stabilizers is 14 feet and there is only 12 feet of drivable roadway now. The Department needs physical access, and, while a painted red stripe parking restriction might help ambulances and cars, it wouldn't work for their larger vehicles. While much progress has been made by upgraded Fire Codes, the risk remains and trucks are still needed.

Commissioner Apostol subsequently moved (Bordokas seconded) to approve the project as designed and deny the appeal, with two conditions; that the street be widened per the staff recommendation and secondly, that there be an additional area in the right-of-way that is flat and walkable, not sloped and with the design subject to staff approval without ADA ramps at this time.

Discussion followed on the motion: it was questioned whether this would invite unwanted liability for the City if the public were encouraged to walk in an area that is privately designed and improved (Ortmann), and whether liability is greater because the improvements would be a condition of the City approval (Bordokas), and; widening is favored but not necessarily a full sidewalk (Chair Hersman).

Howard Crabtree, project architect stated that the applicant favors a usable flat area perhaps some meandering walking surfaces in the 27th Street right-of-way.

Commissioner Ortmann added his concern that he saw a potential that the buyers of the units may want to discourage the public from walking in front of the units and this could create unwanted issues.

Commissioner Apostol retracted his previous motion and made a new motion (Bordokas seconded) to deny the subject appeal, and approve the subject Coastal Development Permits and subdivision maps, allowing the demolition of an existing duplex and construction of two new 2-Unit condominium projects, subject to the condition that the applicant install public street improvements, only including the 4-foot widening on 27th Street as recommended by Staff in the Staff Report dated October 14, 2015.

Discussion followed on the new motion: It is unclear what problem is being solved - while there will be better fire truck access, issues on Vista Drive are not being addressed (Ortmann); this would address the congestion problem faced by cars turning left from Vista Drive to 27th Street (Bordokas); this solves the problem for cars, but not people (Conaway). Commissioner Apostol clarified his motion: while he originally favored an increase of the ground floor setback on Vista Drive, he doesn't believe it is appropriate to change the zoning regulations.

Roll-call vote:

AYES: Apostol, Bordokas, Chairperson Hersman
NOES: Conaway, Ortmann
ABSENT: None
ABSTAIN: None

Director Lundstedt announced that this item would be forwarded to the City Council with the recommendation to Receive and File, thereby affirming the Commission's decision.

DIRECTOR'S ITEMS

There will be a November 19th joint meeting at 6:00 pm but the regular meetings on November 11th and 25th will be cancelled. The Commission will meet on October 28th.

6. PLANNING COMMISSION ITEMS

In response to Commissioner Bordokas, Director Lundstedt stated that in order to address how to form a plan for streets that lead to Highland Avenue, this issue would need to be scheduled on a future Commission agenda.

7. TENTATIVE AGENDA – October 28.

- a. 2702 N. Ardmore - Variance**

8. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 pm to Wednesday, October 28, 2015 in the City Council Chambers, City Hall, 1400 Highland Avenue.

ROSEMARY LACKOW
Recording Secretary

ATTEST:

MARISA LUNDSTEDT
Community Development Director