

**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE
CITY OF LOS ALTOS, HELD ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 2021 BEGINNING AT
7:00 P.M. AT LOS ALTOS CITY HALL, ONE NORTH SAN ANTONIO ROAD,
LOS ALTOS, CALIFORNIA**

Please Note: Per California Executive Order N-29-20, the Commissions will meet via teleconference only. Members of the public may call (650) 242-4929 to participate in the conference call (Meeting ID: 149 818 5195 or via the web at <https://meetings.ringcentral.com/j/1498185195> (Password: 022278). Public testimony will be taken at the direction of the Commission Chair and members of the public may only comment during times allotted for public comments. You may watch the meeting live at <https://www.facebook.com/CityOfLosAltos>. Members of the public are also encouraged to submit written testimony prior to the meeting at PlanningCommission@losaltosca.gov or Planning@losaltosca.gov. Emails received prior to the meeting will be included in the public record.

ESTABLISH QUORUM

PRESENT: Chair Ahi, Vice-Chair Bodner, Commissioners Doran, Mensinger, Roche and Steinle

ABSENT: Commissioner Marek

STAFF: Community Development Director Biggs, Planning Services Manager Persicone, and City Attorney Houston

PUBLIC COMMENT ON ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA

None.

STUDY SESSION

1. 355 First Street-Study Session with the Commission-SB 330

The applicant has submitted a pre-application under the provisions of SB 330 to receive preliminary feedback from the community and Planning Commission. The project would consist of receiving approval of a Design Review permit and Tentative Map subdivision for a new four story fifty (50) unit multifamily condominium building. *Project Manager: Persicone*

Planning Services Manager Persicone gave the agenda report and a PowerPoint presentation.

Jeff Potts, project architect with SDG Architects, provided an overview of the project and gave a PowerPoint presentation of the plans. He stated the proposed project is a 50-unit, four-story building with two levels of underground parking and 111 parking spaces in total.

Commissioner Questions

Commissioner Steinle asked about the heights of the buildings for the projects at 369 and 100 First Streets. He also asked the applicant about materials being used and the difference in colors in the model shown.

Community Development Director Bigg answered that staff did not have the dimensions for 369 and 100 First Streets at the moment. Jeff Potts explained the color differences.

Commissioner Doran asked about the two-foot widening of the alley in the back, if the landscaping would be consistent with other landscaping on Whitney Street, questioned the current pathway between buildings, and the sidewalk widths.

Community Development Director Bigg explained that the two-foot widening of the alley has been applied as a condition of approval to other projects approved that abuts the alley. Jeff Potts explained the landscaping, that the pathway is located on private property and is not an easement, and that the sidewalk is being widened from five feet to six feet with the requested one-foot dedication easement by the City.

Commissioner Bodner asked about peer architectural review and the use of Trespa as a material.

Community Development Director Bigg explained that peer review will be done at formal submittal. Jeff Potts explained that they are committed to the materials at formal submittal and what the Commission decides to approve.

Public Comment

Resident Jon Baer referred to his comments in his letter to the Commission; said the Community Meeting was not properly noticed; the project is a massive cube and needs more articulation; this is a missed opportunity, and this project belongs on El Camino Real.

Resident Roberta Phillips stated that 15 percent affordable BMRs is too low and it should be at least 20 percent to help with our RHNA numbers; the 4th story needs a setback; and had traffic concerns.

PC Discussion

Commissioner Roche said this is a massive building; the fourth floor could benefit from some setbacks and better articulation; there are missed opportunities; should incorporate a peaked roof along Whitney Street; the 46-foot-tall architecture is not redeeming; does not know if the material mix works; asked if the project could be toned down in some manner; and noted the design needs work.

Commissioner Steinle stated that parking is good and appreciated that no vehicle lifts were used; his impression is that the project was designed from the inside out; the rear elevation is more successful than the front and had balconies; asked if the units could be made smaller to make them more affordable by design; noted fewer units and smaller units would require less overall square footage; asked if a mixed-use project been considered; think about downtown walkability and pedestrian scale; concluded by stating this is a good start but more work needs to be done.

Commissioner Doran said that this is an opportunity to create a buffer zone at the sidewalk between the pedestrian zone and the building; the middle light well creates a tunnel effect; agrees with Commissioner Roche and Steinle that this is a little too bulky for First Street; and noted the objective standards under consideration tonight would require a different building with more step backs at the upper levels.

Vice-Chair Bodner appreciates the vision to group parcels; noted four stories is the future for the City; but commented the proposed design is more appropriate for El Camino Real; it does not have a downtown pedestrian feel; suggested the architect pay attention to the objective standards being developed; needs more vertical and horizontal articulation; the building reads as one large expanse and could be articulated better; recess the upper floors; have more than one entrance; more landscaping would be better; needs a softer transition between the building and the back of the

sidewalk; building could be warmed up with smaller bays and different use of materials; has concern with privacy related to the window placement and style and needs a more residential feel; thought and detail need to be given to the balconies; roof deck needs to insulate noise and light to neighbors; back alley widening is a plus and needed; and noted City should take time to revisit the parking space widths to get more spaces as the applicant suggested.

Commissioner Mensinger agreed with the other commissioner comments; more appropriate for El Camino Real; less bulk and mass; and need more space for children and families.

Chair Ahi likes the project as a whole; could use some more affordable units; does not appear as a “residential” development; design is lacking and does not fit in our downtown; building is the same in horizontally and vertically; review the corners; too heavy a form at the top of the building; review the density of the site; lacks village character; lacks a mix of height; materials needs more work because it looks heavy and has too much similarity; disconnect between elevations and program; look at how the program can connect more with the elevation design/architecture; entry is underwhelming for a 50-unit building and is a missed opportunity; the interior court yard square footage can be used in a better way; not objecting to the project, but the design does not go above and beyond what is just required; also consider how this building will relate to pedestrians and the community.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION/ACTION

CONSENT CALENDAR

2. Planning Commission Minutes

Approve minutes of the regular meeting of December 17, 2020.

Action: Upon motion by Commissioner Steinle, seconded by Chair Ahi, the Commission approved the minutes from the December 17, 2020 Regular Meetings as written.

The motion was approved (6-0) by the following vote:

AYES: Ahi, Bodner, Doran, Mensinger, Roche and Steinle

NOES: None

PUBLIC HEARING

3. Zoning Text Amendment - ZTA 20-0003 - Objective Zoning Standards

Zoning text amendment to Title 14 (Zoning) of the Los Altos Municipal Code to provide objective zoning standards for housing development projects. The proposed Ordinance relates to organizational or administrative activities of governments that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment, and therefore is exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3).

Project Manager: Persicone

Monica Szydlik with Lisa Wise Consulting presented and went over the changes directed by the Planning Commission.

Public Comment

Resident Jon Baer commented on slide 15 and 30 that shows the CRS zone with three-story buildings and said to revise it because it looks like we are increasing the height standards.

Resident Roberta Phillips said that the proposed regulations appear to increase density and bulk and asked why the setbacks are being reduced down to five feet.

Resident Terri Couture agreed with Jon Baer, and is worried about a five-foot setback for the third story, then it should be a 10-foot setback for the fourth story and suggested looking to the Downtown Vision to keep the character of downtown Los Altos.

Salim, whose parents live in Los Altos, asked about upper story setbacks and how they comply with SB 330 which forbids reducing the sites potential for housing by increasing setbacks.

Chair Ahi closed the public comment section of the meeting.

The Commissioners discussed the Zoning Text Amendment to provide objective zoning standards for housing development projects and gave the following comments:

Commissioner Steinle:

- Thinks the commercial Districts are fine and is prepared to move that section forward to the City Council;
- He is more concerned about the proposed rules for the R Districts, especially R3-3, R3-4.5, and R3-5;
- The proposed standards could not be applied to these districts and are unrealistic given the current characteristics of these districts; and
- Suggested the Commission spend more time talking about the R District rules and noted he is not ready to move the standards for these forward.

Commissioner Doran:

- Noted she would consider revisiting the R3 Districts given what Commissioner Steinle said; and
- Asked about the process to review this section again because the earlier project reviewed this evening was the catalyst for a possible closer look.

Attorney Houston said the objective standards need to move forward as a whole and not piecemeal and that the Commission could move them forward to City Council with specific comments and direction.

Chair Ahi:

- Noted the Commission has looked at these rules several times already, and he is ready to move forward to City Council with direction;
- Suggested not being too restrictive with the R zones;
- Noted the request for an annual review to see what is working and what is not will allow the City to adjust these rules as needed.

Monica Szydluk with Lisa Wise Consulting stated that the intent was not to replicate the building type and forms in the existing codes, but introduce design standards and coherent design, that is cognizant of adjacencies and articulation in the multi-family zones.

Commissioner Steinle:

- Asked if we need objective standards for districts, like the R3-5, where the likelihood of redevelopment is practically nil; and
- Sufficient time has not been spent discussing the R Districts and passing this on to Council this evening is a missed opportunity.

Vice-Chair Bodner:

- Agreed with Chair Ahi that this needs to be moved forward with the acknowledgement that the R districts could be modified if future evaluations call for it;
- Noted the Commission could provide specific direction to the City Council but did not support a revisit with another meeting.

Commissioner Roche:

- Agreed that not discussing the R Districts was a missed opportunity; and
- Asked what the disadvantages would be to have another meeting.

Chair Ahi in answer noted:

- The task is not to design little individual pockets or areas around Los Altos.

Commissioner Mensinger:

- Agreed that it is time to move this on to the City Council; and
- We can relook at this after a year and the Objective Standards should move forward so Council can begin its review.

Commissioner Doran agreed and said it is time to move this forward to City Council.

Action: Upon motion by Vice-Chair Bodner, seconded by Commissioner Doran, to recommend the Objective Standards to the City Council with the changes proposed at this meeting included in the changes outlined in the Arata PowerPoint.

The motion was approved (6-0) by the following vote:

AYES: Ahi, Bodner, Doran, Mensinger, Roche and Steinle

NOES: None

ABSENT: Marek

DISCUSSION

4. Planning Commission Workplan

The Commission by consensus agreed with the list staff provided.

Attorney Houston suggested adding some Code clean-up to the Workplan.

Chair Ahi suggested looking at the planning process as a whole to see if the Commission can make it more effective/efficient.

COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS AND COMMENTS

None.

POTENTIAL FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Community Development Director Biggs provided an overview of upcoming projects and meetings.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Ahi adjourned the meeting at 9:37 P.M.

Jon Biggs
Community Development Director