

Aug. 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**Emily Kallas / Jodie Gerhardt**

City of Palo Alto  
Planning & Development Services Department  
285 Hamilton St, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Palo Alto, CA 94301

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**RE: 70 ENCINA AVE – PLANNING REVIEW PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Dear Ms. Kallas,

On behalf of our client Stormland LLC., Hayes Group Architects submits this project description along with an application form, a set of design drawings and required documents to request planning review for entitlement.

The site is comprised of two parcels totaling 12,120 SF located in the CC zone along Encina Avenue, behind the Town & Country shopping center. The site was previously used as a surface parking lot for the shopping center.

**Proposed Project**

The proposed project consists of a new 3-story, 22,355 SF building (1.84 FAR), and full site improvements to replace the existing surface parking area. The proposed design organizes 10 new 3-story townhouse style residential units around a common central courtyard.

The front facade creates a strong edge along Encina Ave, with the building mass pulled back 3 feet at the ground floor behind raised planters. The building facades facing both interior side-yards are set back a minimum of 5 feet, with additional intermittent setbacks to break up the massing and accentuate the identity of each individual residential unit.

The primary building materials exposed to public view are brick veneer (at the ground floor), board and batten, linear rainscreen siding, vertical slat screens, pre-finished glazing frames, clear glass, and standing seam metal roof.

**Project History**

Back in May of 2022 we submitted an application for a PHZ 'Pre-Screening' hearing for a larger project on the same parcel(s). That hearing was held on Sept 12, 2022. While the project received a warm reception by Council members, there was objection from the neighboring shopping center, mostly regarding the size and height of the proposed project.

After reviewing the project with the neighbors and studying various alternative project configurations, we have determined to modify the project as follows:

1. Reduction in height from five (5) stories to three (3). This greatly reduces visibility of the project from within the neighboring Town & Country shopping center.
2. The reduction in height also results in a reduction in residential unit count from twenty units (20) to ten (10). The previous project configuration consisted of four (4) stories of residential area over one floor of parking and common area. The new configuration proposes two (2) stories of living area over individual private garages located at the ground level of each unit.
3. In an effort offset the financial impact of the reduced unit count, the project approach was changed from 'flat' (single story) units over a podium, to three-story town-house units, sometimes referred to as 'carriage units' since their ground floors consist of a private garage. This eliminates costly concrete construction at the ground level and minimizes interior common area. It also eliminates the need for common stairs and an elevator since all units are 'walk-up' units, accessed from grade level, and simplifies the configuration and cost of structural systems.
4. The now proposed ten (10) residential units are organized around a common access court that provides both vehicular and pedestrian access. This courtyard is 30 feet wide and roughly 80 feet long, mostly open to the sky, and is proposed to have pavers for the ground surface and include tall narrow trees to create a more natural and inviting environment with less focus on cars, and bollards to ensure protection of the pedestrian entry points to each unit. This concept is similar to the well-known and successful project: Fulton Grove, located at 421 to 457 Fulton Street in San Francisco, CA.
5. The proposed design incorporates numerous planting / green features throughout the building, contributing to enhancing the aesthetic appeal and softening the building façade.

On December 7<sup>th</sup> 2024 this revised project direction was presented in a Preliminary ARB hearing. While opinions of board members varies widely, there was general consensus around the need to loosen up the vehicular entrance, the desire to activate the Encina street frontage, the need to provide some setback at the rear façade, and feedback from the fire department about the need to provide additional roof access provisions.

We also attended a DRC meeting on January 17<sup>th</sup> 2024 and a formal PHZ application was submitted on March 17<sup>th</sup> 2024.

In the formal submittal package we addressed comments received from the DRC as summarized below:

1. **Vehicular Entry:** The vehicular entry gate has been widened from the 14' code minimum to 18 feet. The garage doors to the front units have also been pushed deeper into the site and the entry court width widened by 4 feet to create more maneuvering space.
2. **Activate Encina Frontage:** We have flipped the front unit layouts, so the stairways are on the front façade instead of being buried behind interior program. Locating a transitional semi-private space such stairs at the façade allows us to create more windows without concerns about visibility into more private spaces.
3. **Rear Setback:** The upper 2 stories have been set back 3'-9" from the rear property line. This breaks down the massing and allows us to introduce windows facing Town & Country, so the rear façade feels more open instead of closed.
4. **Roof Access:** We met several times with the Palo Alto Fire Department and established the need to provide ladder accessible paths to the roof at both the front and rear property lines. We also changed the side yards from private areas to common egress and access paths. Built-in roof access stairs have also been integrated into the architecture at both the front and rear facades. The front access is concealed behind the façade and connected to new front facing terraces. The rear access stairs are screened by a new vertical slat screen wall along the

property line that also provides privacy for the new rear facing windows. The slats are spaced far enough apart to allow the passage of light and filtered visibility.

Following additional coordination with several city departments we further revised our design as follows and submitted the revised package at the end of July 2024.

1. **Rear bedroom (Unit 'D') egress window:** after additional meetings with the fire dept., it was concluded that there should be 12ft of horizontal clearance for rescue ladders. We pushed the window inwards to obtain the clearance.
2. **Subsurface transformer in a planted island:** due to various constraints, we are proposing a planted utility island to also accommodate a subsurface transformer, please see the letter provided separately for a detailed discussion of this proposal.
3. **Expanded refuse room:** in order to satisfy the refuse room layout requested by the waste management dept., we expanded the room by approx.100 SF (from 144SF to 240SF) while relocating the fire backflow device on the front façade.
4. **To brighten up the façade:** we replaced the dark gray color rainscreen with a lighter (to match with the brick veneer on ground level) color to enhance the building façade appearance and also to address some comments/ concerns made from some of the board members during the preliminary ARB hearing.

## PHZ Summary

As noted in the previous PHZ Program Statement, the use of a PHZ designation continues to be essential for the following reasons:

- a. The underlying Zoning designation of CC would only allow for an FAR of 0.6:1. This limited development potential severely hinders the number of housing units that can be built. Coupled with the high price of land it also further challenges the inclusion of affordable housing. Under these regulations the site would be limited to a maximum of 4 residential units atop fully or semi-underground parking. Application of PHZ regulations would allow for a significant increase in unit count as illustrated in the attached plans. The proposed residential design is supported with the surroundings as there are adjacent planned community and hospital buildings of much greater heights.
- b. The proposed uses in this project are limited to private residential condominiums, including support and amenity spaces related to residential use. Support and amenity spaces include usable open space, parking, shared circulation, utilities, and trash & recycling.
- c. The nature of all proposed uses is that of residential living and associated activities. Each residential unit will contain its own private kitchen and bathing facilities, with all parking concealed in fully enclosed private garages.

Below is a schedule of unit types and sizes and anticipated sales prices. Please note that sales prices are based on an estimated sales price of \$1,250 per occupied square foot, not including common areas such as parking and utilities etc.

unit description	BR#	unit size (avg)	quantity	sales price (avg)
3 BEDROOM (1 CAR PARKING)	3BR	1,572 SF	1	\$1,896,250
3 BEDROOM (1 CAR PARKING)	3BR	1,632 SF	1	\$1,998,500
3 BEDROOM (2 CAR PARKING)	3BR	1,555 SF	6	\$1,937,500

2 BEDROOM (1 CAR PARKING)	2BR	1,369 SF	2	\$1,788,750
<b>TOTAL:</b>			<b>10</b>	

**Note:** Sales prices shown above are for market rate units. Unit sizes represent livable area, not including ground floor garage and storage areas. 20% of units will be sold or rented as BMR units. Pricing for Below Market Rate units shall be established by the Director of Planning & Development Services in accordance with the City's website.

### Expected Construction Timeline

Construction Phase:	Start Date	End Date
Overall Construction Schedule (start and completion date for entire project)	Oct. 2025	Dec. 2026
Demolition	10/1/2025	10/15/2025
Site Preparation	10/1/2025	10/15/2025
Grading	10/16/2025	11/5/2025
Building Construction	11/6/2025	6/1/2026
Asphalt Paving	9/1/2026	9/4/2026
Architectural Coating	4/1/2026	12/31/2026
Other (e.g., Groundwater Dewatering):		
Other (e.g., Trenching/Utilities):	10/16/2025	12/1/2025

If you have any questions regarding the contents of this letter or the accompanying plans, please feel free to contact me by phone or email.

Sincerely,




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Jeff Galbraith  
Principal  
Hayes Group Architects Inc.  
(650) 223-4026  
jgalbraith@thehayesgroup.com