COUNCIL MEETING
1/23/2023
☑Received Before Meeting
13

CITY OF PALO ALTO

575 Los Trancos Road

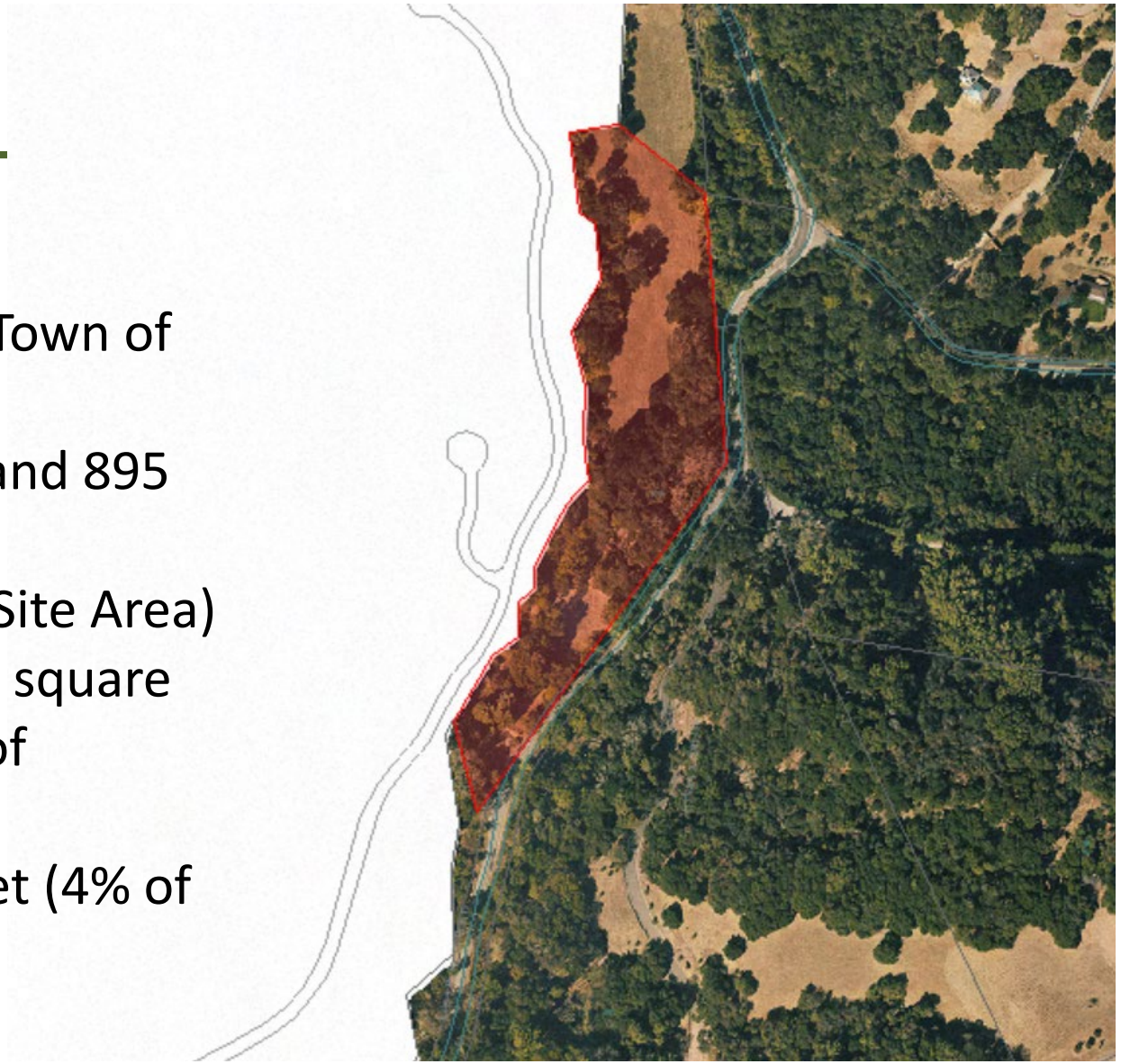
Single Family House
Site and Design Review Permit

January 23, 2023

www.cityofpaloalto.org

Project Overview

- 5.38 acre vacant property
  - Adjacent to Los Trancos Creek and Town of Portola Valley
- Proposed FAR includes 7,245 sf house and 895 square feet ADU (8,140 sf total)
- Maximum allowed FAR is 9,374 (4% of Site Area)
- Proposed impervious coverage is 6,925 square feet of building and 2,267 square feet of hardscape (9,192 sf total)
  - Maximum allowed 9,374 square feet (4% of Site Area)
- Zoning: Open Space (OS)



Process Overview

Major Site & Design Review:

- The site and design review provides a process for review and approval of development in environmentally and ecologically sensitive areas, including established community areas which may be sensitive to negative aesthetic factors, excessive noise, increased traffic or other disruptions, in order to assure that use and development will be harmonious with other uses in the general vicinity, will be compatible with environmental and ecological objectives, and will be in accord with the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan.

This project received PTC recommendation for approval on 8/31/22 and is now before the Council.

Process Overview

Site & Design Review Applications:

Planning & Transportation Commission

(Single Family Homes Exempt from Architectural Review Board)

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City Council

Site & Design Findings / Objectives

(a) construction and operation is orderly, harmonious, and compatible with existing or potential uses of adjoining or nearby sites.
(b) ensure the desirability of investment or other authorized occupations, in the same or adjacent areas.
(c) ensure that sound principles of environmental design and ecological balance shall be observed.
(d) ensure that the use will be in accord with the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan.

Project Review

The site has a Comprehensive Plan land use designation of Streamside Open Space (SOS) and is zoned Open Space (OS).

The SOS designation is intended to preserve and enhance corridors of riparian vegetation along streams. Hiking, biking and riding trails may be developed in the streamside open space. The corridor will generally vary in width up to 200 feet on either side of the center line of the creek.

Single Family Residential is a permitted land use in the OS district. The establishment of an ADU is permitted in all zoning districts where single-family residential is a permitted land use.

Project Review – Open Space Review Criteria

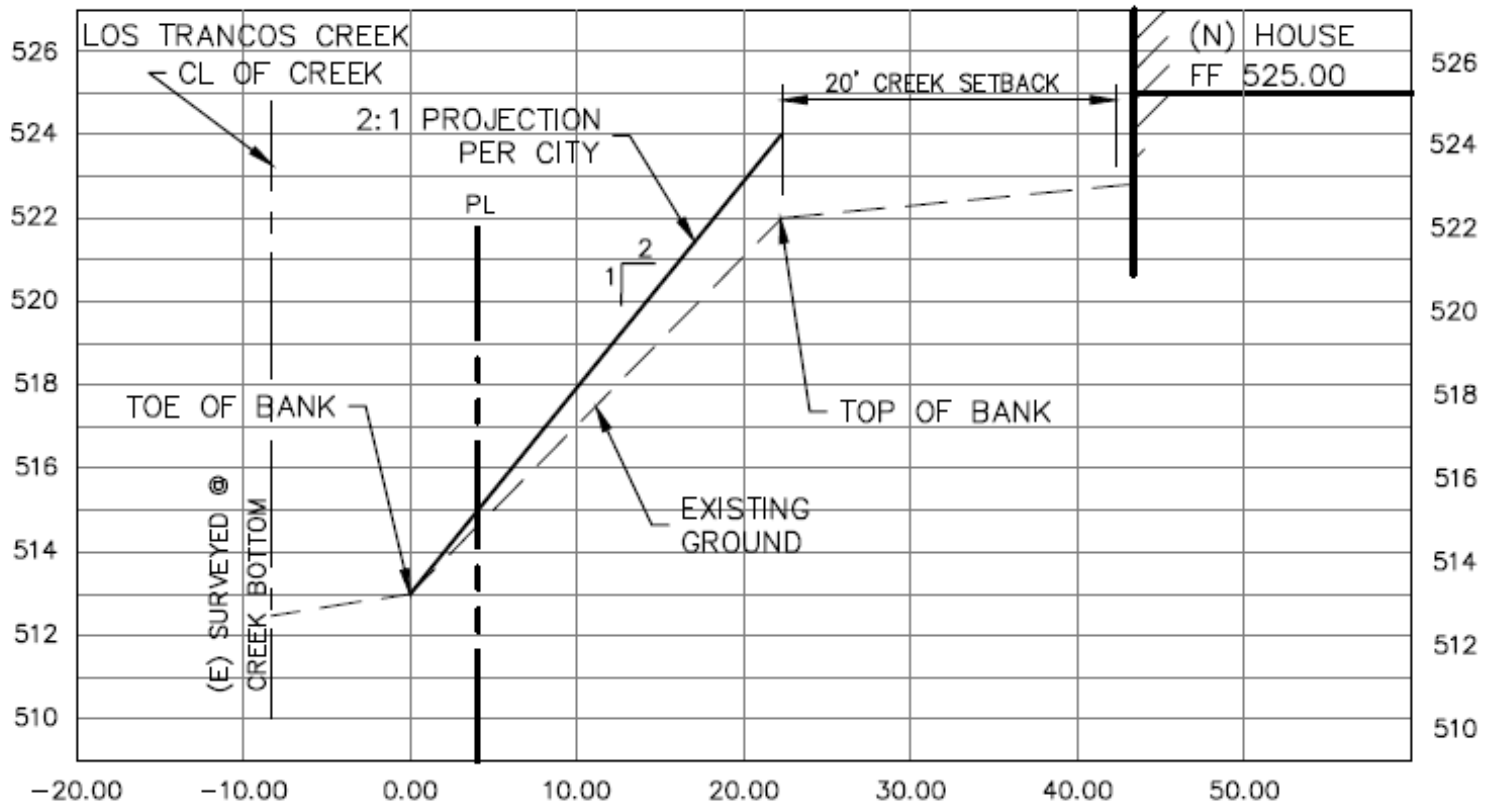
The following criteria shall be considered in the Site and Design review of all development in the Open Space district.

1. not be visually intrusive from public roadways and public parklands / as much as possible hidden from view;
2. located away from hilltops and designed to not extend above the nearest ridge line;
3. consideration of impacts on privacy and views of neighboring property;
4. should be clustered to minimize access roads, and reduce fragmentation of natural habitats;
5. built and landscape forms should mimic the natural topography;
6. existing vegetation should be retained as much as possible; trees with a circumference of 37.5 inches should be preserved;
7. Cut is encouraged when it is necessary for geotechnical stability and to enable the development to blend into the natural topography; fill is generally discouraged and should never be distributed within the driplines of existing trees;
8. To reduce the need for cut and fill and to reduce potential runoff, large, flat expanses of impervious surfaces should be avoided;
9. Buildings should use natural materials and earth-tone or subdued colors;
10. Landscaping should be native species that require little or no irrigation; fire retardant plants should be used as a fire prevention technique;
11. Exterior lighting should be low-intensity and shielded from view so it is not directly visible from off-site; and,
12. Access roads should be of a rural rather than urban character.

Setback from the Creek

- The Zoning Ordinance requires a 20 foot setback from the top-of-bank.
- The Comprehensive Plan includes a policy to “explore” a 150 foot setback from streams and conditions for a reduced setback for single family residences.
- This policy has not been implemented in the zoning code.

Creek to House Diagram



A CREEK SECTION

SCALE: 1"=10' VERT & HORZ 1"=4'

Creek Conditions – Aug ‘22 and Jan ‘23

Environmental Review – IS/MND Prepared

- An Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration has been prepared and circulated.
- Potentially affected environmental factors include: Air Quality, Biological Resources, Geology/Soils, Hydrology/Water Quality, and Cultural Resources.
- Proposed mitigations include standard pre-construction and construction-phase mitigations, with no need for post-construction mitigation or monitoring.
- Public comments were received and responded to in the MND.

Lighting Updates

As a response to the concerns raised at the PTC meeting, the following changes were made to the design:

- Automatic blackout shades will be installed on all upper-story windows facing the creek, to limit nighttime light intrusion on potential local wildlife.
- Recessed lighting has been relocated further away from these windows and the rooms have vacancy sensors.
- Exterior lighting will have motion sensors and be the minimum required by the Building Code.

Fire Risk Updates

The following changes were incorporated into the Conditions of Approval:

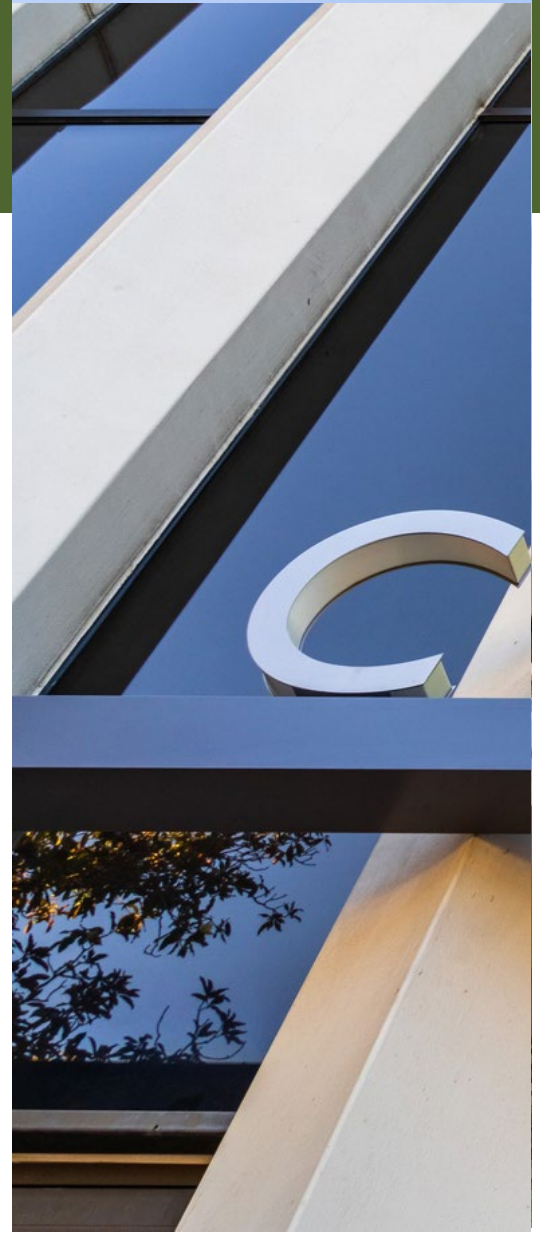
- At the time of Building Permit application, the applicant shall prepare a Fire Protection Plan to the satisfaction of the Fire Code Official, and meeting the requirements of California Fire Code 4903.1-4903.4 (corresponds to PAMC 15.04.195).

- Defensible space shall be maintained in compliance with California Fire Code 4907.1- 4907.2 (corresponds to PAMC 15.04.200).

Public Comments

The City has received correspondence since this item was published expressing concern about the proposed development, including:

- Concern about an inadequate setback from creek / riparian area;
- Disruption to wildlife due to light and noise and need for bird safe design solutions;
- Impacts from runoff or erosion impacting endangered steelhead and aquatic habitat;
- Home placement creates a conflict between riparian protection and wildfire defensible space;
- Concern about deferred project mitigation;
- Geotechnical studies and suggestion for over-excavation potentially into the protected habitat; and,
- Impact to riparian tree identified as #30 on the project plans.



Recommendation

Recommend approval of the proposed Site and Design Review based on the objectives and Open Space Design Criteria, subject to conditions of approval.

<u>Alternative Actions</u>:

A. Provide direction and remand the project back to the Planning and Transportation Commission

B. Provide direction and remand the project back to the City Council

C. Provide other direction as appropriate.

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