



CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**

CITY OF PALO ALTO
Architectural Review Board
Regular Meeting
Thursday, March 20, 2025
8:30 AM

Agenda Item

4. Draft Architectural Review Board Meeting Minutes for February 20, 2025



ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD MEETING
DRAFT MINUTES: February 20, 2025
Council Chamber & Zoom
8:00 AM

Call to Order / Roll Call

The Architectural Review Board (ARB) of the City of Palo Alto met on February 20, 2025 in Council Chambers and virtual teleconference at 8:48 a.m.

Present: Chair Kendra Rosenberg, Vice Chair Yingxi Chen, Board Member Peter Baltay, Board Member David Hirsch

Absent: Board Member Mousam Adcock

Chair Rosenberg welcomed all to the meeting.

The clerk called roll and declared there was a quorum.

Oral Communications

None.

Agenda Changes, Additions and Deletions

None.

City Official Reports

1. Director's Report, Meeting Schedule, and Upcoming Agenda Items

Historic Preservation Planner/ARB Liaison Steven Switzer announced that the March 6 meeting would address 180 El Camino Delarosa exterior upgrades and there would be a report out from the ad hoc for the objective standards on townhomes. There would be a little information on the townhomes item today. There had been no recently submitted items since the last hearing, and staff did not have any items of note for the Board.

Chair Rosenberg asked if there had been any recently submitted items at the last meeting.

Planner/Liaison Switzer answered that there had been no recently submitted items at the last hearing.

Interim Manager of Current Planning Claire Raybould added there being no recently submitted items was a natural ebb and flow.

Chair Rosenberg asked if any Board members had questions about upcoming projects.

Planner/Laison Switzer voiced that there was a scheduled, planned absence for June 19. He requested that Board members direct to his or Administrative Associate Veronica Dao's attention any planned absences.

Board Member Hirsch stated he may be in New York in April and he would let staff know.

Vice Chair Chen mentioned that she had travel plans during the summer, which she would relay to staff.

Action Item

2. Ad Hoc Committee Report: Review Ad Hoc committee Report on Objective Standards for Townhomes and Provide Direction to Staff

Chair Rosenberg stated that staff recommended continuing the Ad Hoc Committee Report on objective standards to March 6, 2025.

Historic Preservation Planner/ARB Laison Steven Switzer provided a background of the objective design standards adopted in 2022. He stated that additional time was needed to wrap up to fully present it back to the Board.

Board Member Hirsch explained why he had requested the item be deferred.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

MOTION: Chair Rosenberg, seconded by Vice Chair Chen, moved to continue the item to March 6, 2025.

VOTE: Motion carried 4-0-1 (Adcock absent)

3. Discussion on Criteria for Architectural Review Board Design Awards: Recognizing Built Projects (2020-2024)

Chair Rosenberg commented that staff recommended the ARB review the list of 28 projects reviewed by the ARB since 2020; discuss the ARB design awards, including evaluation criteria, time line, awards, and categories; and decide on award winners.

Historic Preservation Planner/ARB Laison Steven Switzer hoped that some award-winning projects could be decided on at this meeting as well as further discussion at this hearing and offline for a time line, number of awards, the evaluation process, securing an event space, and the items that would follow. He furnished slides and outlined what had occurred at the December 19, 2024 and January 16, 2025 meetings. Since the last meeting, each Board member had sent in photos of their short-listed projects, which he displayed on a slide. The next steps included narrowing down the project list. The intent was to select five, although there could be honorable mentions, etc.

Chair Rosenberg remarked that she had sent in projects that had not been started, and she requested that staff comment on how such projects would be handled.

Planner/Laison Switzer explained that there was an award cycle every five years and any projects not completed or under construction would be rolled over to the next eligible list.

Chair Rosenberg requested that Board members note such projects on the list in the future.

Planner/Laison Switzer shared slides with Board Member Baltay's submitted projects at 555 Middlefield Road, 588 Webster Street, and 620 Emerson Street; Vice Chair Chen's project at 3215 Porter Drive; Board Member Hirsch's projects at 1700 Embarcadero Road and the pedestrian and bicycle overpass at Highway 101; and Board Member Hirsch's projects, which included Arhaus and Brilliant Earth.

Chair Rosenberg noted that the addresses for Arhaus and Brilliant Earth were 180 El Camino, and she remarked that, in the future, it would be helpful to note the tenant.

Planner/Laison Switzer continued with Board Member Hirsch's projects, which included Restoration Hardware, Alo Yoga Store, Sushi Roku, Wilkes Bashford, and Peloton. Chair Rosenberg had submitted projects, including 4115 El Camino.

Chair Rosenberg asked Board members if the 4115 El Camino would qualify as substantial completion. She felt the project should be rolled to next time.

Board Member Baltay asked if the hardscape was complete and if the building had been finalized.

Chair Rosenberg replied that the hardscape was not complete.

Planner/Laison Switzer responded that the building had not been finalized.

The Board did not consider it complete.

Chair Rosenberg requested that it be added to the rolled list for next time.

Planner/Laison Switzer proceeded to list Chair Rosenberg's projects, which included 3877 El Camino and 695 Arastradero Road.

Chair Rosenberg asked if the images for 3705, the 59 affordable units, were received. She stated that it was an interesting project but not her favorite architectural building.

Planner/Laison Switzer stated that the 59 affordable units may have slipped the slide deck, which he apologized for.

Chair Rosenberg suggested the list be shortened by having Board members indicate whether a particular project should be or not be on the list.

Board Member Baltay wanted to keep 555 Middlefield on the list for now for the elegance of doing so little with the building but yet making it much better.

Board Member Hirsch thought, in terms of residential projects, 588 Webster Street was a possible candidate to remain on the list. He felt there should be additional photos to show other angles. He believed Wilton Court should be on the list.

Board Member Baltay agreed that 588 Webster Street and Wilton Court should be on the short list. He was partial to 620 Emerson Street.

Board Member Hirsch agreed that 620 Emerson Street should be on the list. He suggested that there be more than one picture.

Chair Rosenberg agreed that 620 Emerson Street should be on the list.

Vice Chair Chen stated considered 3215 Porter Drive to be a very thoughtfully planned project. She expressed that it had potential for the award this year.

Board Member Hirsch agreed that it had excellent potential for the award.

Council Member Baltay added that there had been a lot of review and that it was a good building.

Chair Rosenberg expressed why she was partial to 1700 Embarcadero Road. She thought the project was stunning.

Board Member Hirsch agreed with Chair Rosenberg's comments.

Vice Chair Chen also agreed.

Board Member Baltay asked if they could receive a perseverance award.

Board Member Hirsch commented, regarding the Highway 101 pedestrian/bicycle overpass, that there was a bridge competition, although it was not one of the beautiful bridges. If an alternative could be considered, the art piece might be the alternative.

Board Member Baltay commented that the overpass was a good example of where the City dropped the ball.

Chair Rosenberg stated that the moment was special but not the architecture. She added that the Art Committee should keep an eye on this one as it was beautiful public art.

Planner/Liaison Switzer noted for the record that that portion was public art.

Board Member Baltay was not keen on it as public art either.

Chair Rosenberg and Vice Chair Chen agreed with Board Member Baltay.

Chair Rosenberg liked the Arhaus project, but she did not support it receiving an award because she considered others to be better.

Board Member Hirsch favored Arhaus and strongly voted for it.

Board Member Baltay did not support Arhaus receiving an award.

Board Member Hirsch voiced that Brilliant Earth was elegantly simple.

Chair Rosenberg was very fond of the building, but she did not support it being on the list. She wanted the designers to know that she loved the façade of the building.

Board Member Baltay considered the architecture of Brilliant Earth to be head and shoulders better than Arhaus, but he would not put it on the short list.

Vice Chair Chen felt Brilliant Earth was nice, but she stated that there were better choices.

Board Member Hirsch mentioned that there were more significant buildings.

Chair Rosenberg declared that Brilliant Earth would be removed from the list.

Board Member Baltay expressed that Restoration Hardware did not come out as well as he had hoped.

Board Member Hirsch felt the same as Board Member Baltay.

Chair Rosenberg thought the public favored the building, but she would not fight to put it on the list.

Vice Chair Chen did not support it being on the short list.

The Board spoke of the good experience of the building.

Board Member Baltay suggested leaving it on the list for now.

Chair Rosenberg did not support the Alo Yoga Store being on the list, although it was beautiful architecture.

Board Member Hirsch did not support it being on the list.

Vice Chair Chen wanted to keep it on the list.

Board Member Baltay did not support giving it an award, but he suggested it remain on the list to compete with Arhaus.

The Board unanimously decided to keep the Sushi Roku building on the list.

The Board decided to remove Wilkes Bashford from the list.

Board Member Hirsch did not find the Peloton building to be interesting. He suggested that Planner/Laison Switzer look into the signage on the building. He stated that the Board had been strong about the idea that something done for a doorway or a rounded doorway ought not count as part of a sign.

Chair Rosenberg supported removing it from the list.

Interim Manager of Current Planning Claire Raybould agreed that something done for a doorway or a rounded doorway ought not count as part of a sign. She was not sure what aspect of it would have been counted as a sign.

Chair Rosenberg was fond of 3877 El Camino.

Board Member Hirsch expressed that the Porter building was head and shoulders above 3877 El Camino.

Chair Rosenberg agreed.

Vice Chair Chen asked what the building was used for.

Interim Manager Raybould answered that it had various mixed use. She thought there was a small retail component and an office component with residential at the rear.

Chair Rosenberg declared that it would not be included on the list. She noted that 695 Arastradero Road fell short.

Board Member Hirsch did not support the building receiving an award.

Chair Rosenberg declared that it would be removed from the list.

Board Member Baltay supported Wilton Court remaining on the list.

Board Member Hirsch thought the building was excellently designed. He noted that there was a relationship between this building and the housing building on Hamilton, and he stated that it would be hard to choose between the two.

Vice Chair Chen wanted to keep it on the list.

Chair Rosenberg deferred to Board members. She noted for the record that the proportion and the height of the building were spot on. She asked how to move forward in the decision-making and how Board Member Adcock's opinion should be factored in.

Planner/Laison Switzer voiced that, based on the discussion, 9 of the 28 projects were on the shorter list. The correspondence he received from Board Member Adcock expressed that, of the short list provided, the Mercedes-Benz project was her project of choice.

Chair Rosenberg remarked that she had noted 10 on the list, not 9, which included 3705 El Camino, 3215 Porter, 620 Emerson, 555 Middlefield, 588 Webster, Restoration Hardware, Alo Yoga, Sushi Roku, Arhaus, and Mercedes-Benz.

Planner/Laison Switzer declared for the record that there were 10 on the list.

Vice Chair Chen suggested discussing the category.

[The Board took a 15-minute break]

Chair Rosenberg thanked all for their patience with the extended delay in addressing technical issues.

Planner/Laison Switzer supplied slides grouping the buildings into like projects. The residential projects included 3705 El Camino Real and 588 Webster.

Chair Rosenberg was fond of 588 Webster. 3705 El Camino Real was not her favorite.

Board Member Hirsch wanted to pick two residential projects. He thought they would show each other off.

Chair Rosenberg liked the sentiment that they made each other better.

Board Member Baltay supported both projects winning awards.

Vice Chair Chen found it hard to choose as both were really good.

Planner/Laison Switzer advanced to the retail projects.

Interim Manager Raybould noted that the retail projects included Alo Yoga, Sushi Roku, Restoration Hardware, Arhaus, and 620 Emerson.

Board Member Hirsch did not believe they all belonged together even though they were called commercial in some way. Concerning the hotel, he noted that a lot of it was landscaping and the impact on the street, which he considered to be excellent and a winner.

The Board agreed that of the five the Nubo and the Roku Sushi projects were the strongest candidates.

Chair Rosenberg was fond of the Mercedes-Benz project and suggested it be put on the list.

Board Member Hirsch agreed.

Board Member Baltay thought 555 Middlefield could be removed from the list.

Chair Rosenberg believed that its reuse as a façade was important, so she thought maybe it should be the honorable mention of the year because the intent behind it was very important.

Board Member Baltay suggested leaving it on the list for now.

Board Member Hirsch thought the artwork deserved an award.

Vice Chair Chen did not agree with making a decision based on a very small portion if the ARB's job was to review the entire bridge as the project.

Chair Rosenberg agreed, and she suggested that the Art Commission consider it for an award.

Interim Manager Raybould voiced that staff would bring it to the Art Commission's attention.

Board Member Hirsch considered 3215 Porter to be a winner.

Chair Rosenberg agreed.

Board Member Baltay questioned if it was a stronger work of architecture than the Mercedes dealership.

Board Member Hirsch noted that it was a different kind of building.

Chair Rosenberg questioned if it was better than some of the housing, commercial, or retail ones. She found the mixture of architecture to be fascinating and the use to be very striking. She added that the Mercedes-Benz dealership could be considered a retail project and, therefore, compared to Sushi Roku.

Board Member Hirsch added that it lacked the coherence that the Mercedes dealership had.

Vice Chair Chen added that she maybe should have taken more pictures. She discussed the experience of visiting the building in person. She wondered if Board members should visit the sites in person.

Board Member Hirsch found that to be a good suggestion. He remarked that the details of the building were well done, although the shape of the building was somewhat commonplace.

Chair Rosenberg noted that there seemed to be a trend in having pairs of projects for each category, which totaled six projects.

Planner/Liaison Switzer mentioned that there were two for the restaurants, Nobu and Sushi Roku; Mercedes-Benz and 3215 Porter; the two residential projects; and potentially the seventh honorable mention for 555 Middlefield Road. He noted that in 2022 for the 2020 awards 8 projects received awards of which 2 were honorable mentions. There had been 5 awards in 2015, 10 in 2010, and 5 in 1998.

The Board decided to keep six projects on the list.

Chair Rosenberg asked if there should be an honorable mention for 555 Middlefield Road.

Board Member Baltay wanted it to receive an honorable mention.

Board Member Hirsch did not think the justification for it receiving an honorable mention was strong enough. He did not find the building to be attractive. He added that there was zero landscaping as the building was surrounded by parking.

Vice Chair Chen thought it might be helpful to provide before and after photos to show that doing something little could result in a big change. She thought it was important to note that an office building was being reused.

Board Member Hirsch did not consider it worthy of an award. He felt it would diminish the expression of what the ARB stood for if it should be included.

Board Member Baltay commented that Board Member Hirsch made good points. He questioned if purposeful, intelligent, efficient use was architectural excellence.

Board Member Hirsch did not believe that was enough to be considered architectural excellence.

Chair Rosenberg expressed that the process was noted and that the reuse was environmentally beneficial and efficient in many ways. She stated that the concept of taking something that may be a little worse for wear and turning it into something beautiful was worth noting and worth putting it out as a public statement to any potential architects or designers in the Palo Alto boundaries that it was appreciated.

Board Member Baltay added that it was good design work and that things were done to make it much better. He did not feel strongly about it receiving an honorable mention. He thought it was an opportunity more than anything else. He added that he strongly supported the other six.

Board Member Hirsch noted that the windows did not align properly and he questioned whether the canopies served a purpose. He agreed that it was an improvement to the building.

Planner/Liaison Switzer read the 2023 Comprehensive Plan Program Policy that established the award program, which was to promote awards, programs, and other forms of public recognition for projects of architectural merit that contributed positively to the community.

Chair Rosenberg did not think an honorable mention was inappropriate in this case because it was well done for what it was. She wanted it to be recognized.

Board Member Baltay questioned what the folks at Restoration Hardware might think about 555 Middlefield Road coming out on top.

Chair Rosenberg withdrew her comments.

The Board agreed to remove it from the list.

Planner/Liaison Switzer understood that the six projects would move forward.

Chair Rosenberg declared that the six projects were the official 2020 to 2024 Palo Alto ARB winners.

Planner/Laison Switzer noted that the award winners would be contacted and an event space would be secured. He remarked that 2020 awards held in 2022 were held at the City Hall lobby. He added that the large monitor in the City Hall lobby could be used.

Board Member Hirsch asked how the monitor could be used.

Planner/Laison Switzer responded that staff would investigate how the monitor could be used.

Chair Rosenberg voiced that last time staff had coordinated with City Hall and they handled it.

Board Member Hirsch supported doing that if the images could move across the screen.

Planner/Laison Switzer was sure that most of the architects would like to prepare some materials.

Chair Rosenberg added that last time there had been a 24x36 static board requirement. She still had some of the documentation and the actual award certificate templates from last time, which she could send to staff. She thought she had in Word .doc format what had been requested from the architects, which she would email to staff, which might be useful.

Planner/Laison Switzer wanted to confirm that the categories would be residential, retail or restaurant, and commercial.

Board Member Baltay recommended that there not be categories and that the works stand on their own.

Board Member Hirsch agreed.

Planner/Laison Switzer confirmed that there would be six awards.

Board Member Hirsch felt it was important that different images of each one move across the monitor in City Hall. Last year he had moved all the boards around to the libraries, which he wanted done again this year. He wanted to ensure that all the graphics from the applicants would be included separately.

Planner/Laison Switzer responded that staff would look into that.

Chair Rosenberg voiced that Osma did an exceptional job coordinating the food last time, and she requested that she do it this year.

MOTION: Chair Rosenberg, seconded by Vice Chair Chen, moved to approve the following six projects as the 2020 to 2024 Palo Alto ARB Award winners: The Mercedes-Benz dealership, 3215 Porter, 3705 El Camino, 588 Webster, the Nobu Restaurant, and Sushi Roku.

VOTE: Motion carried 4-0-1 (Adcock absent)

Vice Chair Chen asked if there would be another meeting or if a date for the ceremony could be set.

Planner/Laison Switzer answered that in setting an awards ceremony date they could coordinate offline to secure a space and determine how to engage the monitors. Staff would follow up on what would be required.

Board Member Hirsch commented that this was the prettiest pages he had ever seen in the packet, that the color choices were excellent. He wondered if the requirement to have floating elements over the

text could be removed to allow all the text to be readable. He asked if everything could be moved inside the lines.

Planner/Liaison Switzer thought the page number on the packet was fixed. He could look into repositioning that on the page.

Chair Rosenberg stated if the item needed to come back as a discussion maybe it could be tied into the announcements at the end of another meeting, although most of the discussion could be handled offline.

Board Member Baltay did not consider it proper to bring administrative issues like that to the full Board in a public hearing. He felt the Chair, Vice Chair, and staff should do it.

Chair Rosenberg agreed. Once a meeting date was set, it could be in an announcement at the end of an ARB meeting, so any updates would come in the form of announcements at the end of a meeting.

Approval of Minutes

4. Draft Architectural Review Board Meeting Minutes for January 16, 2025

Board Member Hirsch commented that he was not the only one who had talked about the color of the material on the outside, that Vice Chair Chen brought it up, and he just agreed with her comment.

Historic Preservation Planner/ARB Liaison Steven Switzer would make a note of that.

MOTION: Chair Rosenberg, seconded by Board Member Hirsch, moved to approve the minutes.

VOTE: Motion carried 4-0-1 (Adcock absent)

Board Member Questions, Comments, Announcements Or Future Meetings And Agendas

Board Member Hirsch stated there was a big project approaching, an 11-acre site on Geng Road for townhomes. He noted that he and Vice Chair Chen had made comments in the past about the mixing of different prototypes for housing when above one acre, which he noted was not happening on the project. He asked if the comment could be inserted into the process.

Interim Manager of Current Planning Claire Raybould did not want to discuss specific projects but the comment was noted. She added that the planner for that project was in the room. She voiced that it was a builder's remedy application that did not necessarily propose to meet all the requirements of the code. The project would come before the Board as a site and design application. It would also come before the Planning Commission. Ultimately Council would make the decision on the project. Council had not yet been asked to weigh in on it as it would first come to the Planning Commission and the ARB for recommendations.

Board Member Baltay noted that it was unfortunate that the discussion of townhomes had not been completed.

Board Member Hirsch responded that it was coming together. Vice Chair Chen had worked on responding to the request for it to be submitted today, but he was doing a revision of it and there would be coordination to have it ready for the next meeting.

Chair Rosenberg did not know how much the townhomes conversation would have over a builder's remedy project. She noted that the project was not being discussed at this meeting. She stated that staff was aware of the concerns and that they would be addressed upon the project being presented to the ARB.

Board Member Hirsch voiced that it was informative for the ARB to get a readout on projects early on in the way Interim Manager Raybould did it, and he thanked her.

Historic Preservation Planner/ARB Liaison Steven Switzer referenced the packet and noted that it was listed as a pending project in the Director's Report. The address was 2100 through 2400 Geng Road.

Vice Chair Chen asked if staff had an announcement on the senior housing along San Antonio Road.

Planner/Liaison Switzer responded that they did not have an announcement on the senior housing along San Antonio Road. He announced that there were three positions available on the ARB and applications to the Clerk's office were due by February 26.

Chair Rosenberg voiced that all members of the public who were applying should get their application in by February 26.

Board Member Hirsch inquired when the Board would hear the applicants' presentations.

Planner/Liaison Switzer believed the interviews would go before Council. He did not think the Clerk's office had a date set. He thought the details would follow once all the submitted applications were reviewed. Once coming down the pike, he would at least notify Board Member Hirsch and Vice Chair Chen.

Board Member Baltay remarked that the Geng Road project was in the flood plain and there had been many comments about building intensely in that area. He asked if there had been efforts by staff to investigate that. He wanted Council to be fully aware of what was about to happen there.

Interim Manager Raybould replied that they could not get into the details of that specific project.

Chair Rosenberg stated that the project would come to the ARB before going to Council, and upon the ARB's review, any concerns could be presented to Council. If the designer, applicant, or architect decided to do something against the rules, they would run the risk of the project being rejected. She cautioned against speaking out of turn on the project. Until the project was presented, it could not be spoken to. She stated that Board Member Baltay's point was noted, and she voiced that the ARB could address it upon presentation to the ARB. Until then, it was up to the applicant to do their due diligence and to put something responsible forward.

Adjournment

Chair Rosenberg adjourned the meeting at 10:43 a.m.