

Attn:

Honorable Mayor and City Council

07-20-2020

Re. Planning Case P19-0487 (Certificate of Appropriateness, Cultural Heritage Board) Letter of Appeal

Please let this letter serve as a request to appeal the Cultural Heritage Board's initial denial of November 20, 2019, regarding the remodel/addition of the home at 4674 Beacon Way, Riverside, as well as its recent denial of the Certificate of Appropriateness on July 15, 2020.

### **Project History**

At the CHB hearing of October 16, 2019, the Planning staff (Scott Watson) presented our request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for "after-the-fact" demolition of portions of the existing residence's main level and garage and the expansion of the subterranean basement level. The staff indicated that the design of the proposed addition and remodel is considered a modern interpretation of the "Farmhouse Ranch architectural style."

The property is located within the Mt. Rubidoux Historic District but is **not** considered a historically significant house because of the age of the home and the fact that no significant architectural qualities contributed to the original design or its history. The home is considered a "non-historical" structure but is subject to CHB review/approval with the Certificate. The remodel is subject to the Guidelines that are associated with the District home remodel and additions of "non-contributing" residences and should be sensitive to the "Neighborhood Zone" in which the home is located. The residence is located at the top of Beacon Way and is among six out of seven "non-contributing" residences and two vacant lots on Beacon Way. This immediate vicinity constitutes the "Neighborhood Zone" which will dictate the design guidelines and constraints for the remodel and addition.

The **Mount Rubidoux Historic District Design Guidelines** permits construction of contemporary buildings within the District following specific

criteria that is compatible with its “Neighborhood Zone.” The Guidelines Section 8.5 (Design Guidelines for Contemporary Buildings) articulates specific criteria for remodels similar to the proposed improvements. Which we have followed.

They are summarized below:

**1. Articulate Large Masses:**

- The proposed design specifically avoided a “box-like” design by providing horizontal and vertical articulation of the new elevations with deep shadow relief and wood board siding wall materials. The design also introduced various lower arcade structures to break up the massing.

**2. Avoid Blank Walls:**

- The home is articulated on all four sides even though the public will primarily only view the street elevation due to the extreme steep slopes and limited vantage opportunities the site presents. All walls are designed to avoid blank wall appearances.

**3. Retain Scale of Components:**

- The proposed remodel/addition design specifically retained the scale of the existing home. The existing home was a three-bedroom residence and single car garage with extensive roof overhangs, breezeway area, and covered patios. The new proposed two-bedroom home and double car garage expansion are almost entirely within the roof overhead projection of the existing roof except for the expansion of the low roof Master Suite of about 400 SF. The ridge of the new roof is only about 8’ higher than the ridge of the original home. The existing homes surrounding the lot and within the Neighborhood Zone of non-contributing homes are of equivalent scale and size.

**4. Maintain Similar Proportions:**

- The proposed design specifically addresses the unique site conditions of the 360-degree views. The existing extensive

patios around the home are being preserved and the remodel/addition will occupy the area directly above the existing lower supporting sub-basement levels which will remain.

**5. Limit New Emphasis:**

- We introduced various low-roof arcade structures to emulate the front eave line character of the existing home to break up the massing and to be compatible with the adjacent homes within the Neighborhood Zone. The function layout of the remodeled home is very similar to the original residence layout and preserves the character of the entry arcade that exists in the original plan and elevation.

**6. Use Compatible Textures:**

- The exterior building wall materials are simple wood siding and stone veneer and will be compatible with the adjacent homes within the Neighborhood Zone.

**7. Use Related Colors:**

- The original home was white colored plaster and the new home will be painted white wood siding which will be compatible with the adjacent homes within the Neighborhood Zone.

**8. Screen Mechanical Equipment:**

- No mechanical equipment will be visible on the exterior of the home or the street frontage.

**9. Provide Compatible Roof Lines:**

- The roof line ridge is only about 8' higher than the original ridge line and is compatible with the appropriate buildings in the Neighborhood Zone. Lower arcade roofs are introduced to articulate the design and to break up taller walls to be comparable to the existing home.

The Planning staff recommended approval of our application at the October 16, 2019 CHB meeting, and found that our proposed design met the design criteria of the Guidelines and was appropriate to the Neighborhood and District. Their findings and recommendations are summarized below:

- The proposed residential style (Modern Farmhouse Ranch) is consistent with other non-contributing structures within the Historic District and the residence uses materials consistent with those found throughout the District including the proposed siding and stone.
- The proposed single-story remodel/addition matches the height, scale, and massing of the existing residence. The adjacent residences are two and three-story homes in height and the proposed project is consistent with the height, scale, and massing of the adjacent Cultural Resources.
- The proposed residence and garage are situated primarily in the same locations as the original home being replaced. The perimeter and limits of the improvements will be contained within the boundaries of the existing patio decks and retaining walls. There will be no change in relationship to other properties within the District.
- The proposed home does not adversely affect important architectural, historical, cultural, and archaeological features since the new structure is situated directly over the layout of the existing home and no new work is proposed beyond the perimeter of the retaining wall boundaries.
- The proposed Project is consistent with the citywide Residential Historic District Guidelines and compatible with the immediate neighborhood residences.
- The proposed Project is consistent with the Principles of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the treatment of Historical Properties and will be compatible with other residences throughout the District in terms of scale, massing and use of materials. The proposed features of the Farmhouse Ranch style exist throughout the District and will be consistent with the neighborhood.
- The proposed residence complies with the development standards of the Zoning Code.

The CHB did not agree with the proposed recommendation for approval of the Certificate and initially assigned a subcommittee to meet with the Owner and Architect to see if certain design features could be modified to meet their expectations for the proposed remodel/addition. Thus, continuing the review until the November 20<sup>th</sup> meeting. On October 17<sup>th</sup> I notified the Planning staff

(Scott Watson) that the Owner would be willing to meet with the assigned subcommittee as soon as possible to discuss potential modifications to the Project. On October 21<sup>st</sup> we were informed that the assigned subcommittee would **not be able to meet** until after the next November hearing date and that the Owner would need to be present to acknowledge his willingness to meet.

At the November 20, 2019 meeting the Owner indicated that he and the Architect would be willing to meet ASAP to get the Project moving forward. But, after a lengthy CHB discussion, the Board withdrew its invitation to have the subcommittee meet for potential modification of the design. This was extremely surprising and regrettable since the Project application for the Certificate of Appropriateness was subsequently denied by the board at that meeting, without the Owner being given the opportunity to obtain additional guidance on the elements of the design that the board found incompatible.

The Project was subsequently appealed to the Land Use Committee (LUC) for review on January 13, 2020. At this meeting, the LUC forwarded the Project appeal to the City Council with the recommendation that the CHB establish a subcommittee, and attempt, again, to negotiate a compromise on the proposed design that is more compatible with their image of the District Guidelines. The hearing was set for February 11, 2020. The City Council agreed with the recommendation and sent the appeal back to the CHB for consideration and the reformulation of a subcommittee a **second time** to assist with communications of significant items that they determined to be important in making the proposed design more “appropriate.” This second meeting was scheduled for March 18, 2020, but was unfortunately cancelled due to the City’s Covid-19 shut-down.

The next CHB meeting was held remotely on May 20, 2020. At this meeting the Owner, again, agreed to work with a subcommittee. The subcommittee members assigned to this action were the same persons that were on the original subcommittee who ultimately, on November 20, 2019, had refused to meet with us.

The first actual meeting with the CHB subcommittee occurred virtually on May 28, 2020. The members expressed numerous items that they felt were **not appropriate** in the design for this district. They included the following:

- Roofline of Garage
- Roof material

- The shape of the pointed arched window on the east and west elevations
- Black and white color scheme
- Handrail design was too contemporary
- Height of the ridge
- Proposed stone selection and material

At this initial meeting the Owner and Architect agreed to consider the recommendations being presented by the team and return with modifications and/or comment responses.

A second meeting with the subcommittee occurred on June 11,2020. At this meeting the Owner/Architect presented alterations to the design that they felt addressed the most significant items expressed. The modifications included:

- Changing the metal roofing to the proposed asphalt shingles roof.
- Reducing the height on the Garage by creating a ridgeline offset from the original high eave and creating a low eave on the east elevation wall side. This dropped the height by about four feet.
- The black metal roof color was subsequently replaced with a grey shingle selection to soften the expressed color contrast. The original house colors were white with blue trim, so the Owner felt that the new color scheme (white with black trim) matched the existing concept.
- The ridgeline above the home remains the same in that this was an important design parameter for the Living Room space and the site design which takes maximum advantage of the panoramic views to the east and west.
- The stone pattern and materials were modified to address the subcommittee's concern for compatibility with the District.
- A perspective colored rendering of the residence as viewed from Beacon was presented to attempt to convey the scale and design to the subcommittee. They indicated that this helped explain to them the understanding of actual elements that were present.
- The garage door and entre door colors where changed from black to a softer natural wood grain to address the subcommittee's concerns with too much black colors.

The meeting concluded with the "perceived" impression that we had achieved a significant compromise and that the subcommittee would be going to the CHB with a recommendation of approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness.

The next meeting with the CHB was held virtually on July 15, 2020. At this meeting the subcommittee presented a “limited” and “biased” account of the communications and agreements that occurred at our two previous coordination meetings. The CHB and members of the Planning Department discussed the project but provided **no opportunity** for questions and responses from the Owner and/or Architect. It was evident from our observations and their internal discussions that the CHB clearly misunderstood the proposed single story home design. Even though they were all aware that we were in attendance during the 2-½ hour meeting we were **never** asked for a comment or a clarification of the design elements that were critical to the Project and engineering of the home. They obviously did not understand the proposed **design, scale, and size** of the residence. They were adamantly fixated on **not** approving the Certificate.

Another example of the CHB’s unwillingness to understand the design was a discussion they had regarding the possibility of tribal artifacts being discovered and unearthed on this site during demolition and construction without proper treatment. If we had been asked about this we could have clarified the fact that the original residence and its lower 2-story foundation had been constructed on a solid granite portion of the hill. There was no possibility of potential burial grounds and no historically documented evidence of such. The initial home was constructed on a concrete pedestal platform using a perimeter tall retaining wall system that forms a large patio deck area. This platform remains the base of the single story home remodel/addition with no new improvements beyond its original boundaries, leaving the remainder of the large site intact and undisturbed. The only **new** excavation of the site was for an area under the existing concrete deck in a solid granite base for the basement expansion. The proposed home construction is contained within the boundaries of the existing retaining walls. The very notion that the site now contained tribal artifacts was surprising. We were never asked to clarify or comment on the possible discovery of native American ruins or artifacts.

After a very length discussion amongst themselves, all but one member of the CHB voted to deny the project. The time and effort spent, and the extensive communications, coordination and compromises achieved with the subcommittee, had no consequences with the CHB members’ opinions.

During the nine-month period since the original date that the Owner indicated his willingness to meet with a designated subcommittee (October 17, 2019) until this final CHB meeting (July 15, 2020), the CHB has done very little to

understand and assist in formulating an “appropriate” compromise solution. They were predetermined to deny this residence at all costs. This is not the “appropriate” action of a City Board that oversees the historical interests of the City of Riverside (the City where I have been an active and successful Architect for 35 years, this month).

This matter needs to go to the City Council for an unbiased review and appropriate action.

Respectfully,

Randall Neal