

CITY OF SAN DIMAS PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Thursday, May 2, 2013 at 7:00 p.m.
245 East Bonita Avenue, Council Chambers

Present

Chairman Jim Schoonover
Commissioner David Bratt
Commissioner John Davis
Commissioner Stephen Ensberg
Commissioner M. Yunus Rahi
Assist. City Manager for Comm. Dev. Larry Stevens
Senior Planner Marco Espinoza
Planning Secretary Jan Sutton

CALL TO ORDER AND FLAG SALUTE

Chairman Schoonover called the regular meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. and Commissioner Bratt led the flag salute.

CONSENT CALENDAR

1. Approval of Minutes: April 18, 2013 (Davis absent)

MOTION: Moved by Bratt, seconded by Ensberg to approve the Consent Calendar. Motion carried 4-0-0-1 (Davis abstain).

PUBLIC HEARINGS

2. **CONSIDERATION OF MUNICIPAL CODE TEXT AMENDMENT 12-03** – A Request to Amend Section 18.542.250, and other Sections as deemed appropriate, of the San Dimas Municipal Code, to allow an up to 950 Square Foot Second-Story Architectural Element on lots with a One-Story Height Limit and other associated revisions, as deemed appropriate, located in Specific Plan No. 25 in the Northern Foothills of San Dimas. **(Continued from April 18, 2012)**

Staff report presented by *Assistant City Manager Larry Stevens*, who stated this item was continued from the previous meeting after considerable discussion, at the conclusion of which there was a split opinion on whether to allow any change at all or to support a change if there were additional standards. A question was also raised regarding General Plan Policy 10.2.10 which has specific language relative to the number of two-story lots allowed, mimicking the Specific Plan, and whether it needed to be amended as well.

Initially only one-story structures of a certain height were allowed in SP-25. During the review in 2010, 27% of the allowed lots were permitted to have two-story structures as part of the project. Staff suggested there could be different options to approach the Applicant's request for a two-story architectural element. They could consider limiting the number of lots allowed to have this element, or they could set additional standards to minimize possible massing impacts, so Staff undertook a technical review of the project as it relates to Floor Area Ratio (FAR) standards.

He stated Attachment 4 covers the four areas of analysis conducted relative to FAR calculations to pad size and to lot size. They know what the pad sizes will be for each lot based on the submitted grading plans. In some respects it makes more sense using a FAR to pad size, or buildable lot area, than lot size because there is no consistency between the lots. The chart showed how each lot could possibly be developed to the minimum and maximum standards, and while most will not be built to the maximum, and this chart shows that some should not be, it helps in understanding what the ratio would be.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated currently they do not use a FAR in general though it is a commonly accepted standard; that they use lot coverage limitations instead. The standard lot coverage amount in existing single-family developments is 35%, or .35, for all buildings, including garages, patio covers, etc. He stated the chart at the top of page 7 in the report compared the Custom and Semi-Custom lots using a FAR of .50, which is quite a bit higher than the commonly used .35, to see what the impact would be. He explained how the square footage of the habitable structure would be reduced based on the different formulas. This did not include garages, which if built for three to four cars, could be an additional 1,000 square feet. Staff is recommending basing the formula on a combination of habitable and non-habitable space, which would result in a further reduction in floor area.

In response to the Commission, he stated they don't have exact size information on the accessory structures, like garages, yet, and that .50 was an extremely generous target for a FAR to pad size. He felt if there wasn't some type of standard in place, then it could be a struggle getting home plans approved through the DPRB because people will always try to get the maximum possible. If you allow the maximum coverage on some of these lots, there will be no area left for yards, and then people will be trying to create backyards by going into the slope areas. The more he looked at this, the more concerned he became, and felt it was critical they keep the pads from being overbuilt. He felt if they were going to allow the Applicant the extra height requested, they should consider setting some type of standard.

The second alternative of using a FAR to lot area is a similar calculation and the results are shown in Column 10 of Attachment 4. He used a .40 FAR for this comparison because the lot areas are considerably larger, and there are a couple zones in the City that allow going to 40% lot coverage to encourage one-story structures. Staff is not recommending this option, but wanted to include it in the discussion as a comparison for potential parameters. The FAR includes all of the floor area, including above the first floor. If you apply only a lot coverage standard, it only considers the area of the first floor. The last standard shown is not performance based, it is simply a maximum size allowed on each type of lot.

Commissioner Ensberg asked which one of these options would be the easiest to administer, and which accommodates the builder while still achieving the objective of the Staff.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated once you decide what is a fair and reasonable standard, they all involve a simple calculation. It will impose more criteria as people prepare plans, especially on the very small pads. As to the developer, the lowest impact to them would be Alternative 2 or 3. Staff's intent is to keep the maximum floor area down on the parcels least capable of supporting a large structure. The other thing to consider is that the equestrian lots

are all custom lots, but some of the pads are not very large. If you put a 15,000 square foot house on a 20,000 square foot pad, you won't have an equestrian lot any longer because there won't be enough room left to meet the distance requirements for horsekeeping facilities as required by code. If someone only wanted a 5,000 to 6,000 square foot home, there won't be a problem, but there is no guarantee that people won't want the maximum size house. He stated if you look at Morgan Ranch in Glendora, they do not have a one-story limit on height, but the houses cover the entire pad, and some are approaching 20,000 square feet in size.

He stated once Staff receives direction from the Commission, he will prepare code language to reflect the selected standard. In regards to the General Plan, if you considered the 10% or 950 square foot architectural element as an exception to the one-story height limit instead of considering it a second floor, then it would be consistent with the General Plan language, and you could make a finding to support that interpretation. But the argument could also be made that this is adding a second-story and then the General Plan would need to be amended as well. Staff is recommending they consider this as an exception on all one-story lots, and secondly that they establish an additional standard to address massing by using a .50 FAR to pad ratio, including all habitable and non-habitable floor area.

Commissioner Rahi wanted to clarify the pad size includes only the flat buildable area but the lot size included the slopes as well.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated the lot size is based on revisions to the Tract Map, and the pad size is the flat, buildable area that is shown on the grading plan, so they are fairly fixed now. Even if the plan is approved, someone could still come in and propose a change, and that in the future a homeowner might want to try to grade a larger pad area, especially on the custom lots.

Commissioner Davis stated he reviewed the presentation from last meeting, the minutes and the Applicant's presentation so he felt he was familiar with the issue. He asked if the garage across the street from him would be considered an accessory structure. He also stated he did not see in any of the previous information how the architectural elements would be designed, so could they be 10' x 90' or 30' x 30', or would this be something DPRB looks at.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated any building that is not part of the main house is considered accessory, so this action in theory could limit the types and size of those structures. They have not discussed in detail with the Applicant how these elements would be achieved, but the 950 square feet would only be on the custom lots because the semi-custom lots were smaller so the elements would be smaller as well. The house plans will be subject to the normal design review process so the DPRB will consider how it is integrated into the overall design. What Staff is looking for right now is an Ordinance standard that will allow a small component on the site, but to also ensure that the sites will not be overbuilt.

Commissioner Davis stated using the lot coverage standard seemed to be more consistent with other zones in the City. He asked if all the custom homes will be one-story.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated the plan for this project is not consistent with any other zone in the City so that is not really an issue. There have been discussions about mansionization in the past, especially in the downtown area, and using floor area is an effective way to deal with the second-story component. He stated all the custom homes are designed to be one-story, but they could have this additional 950 square foot element.

Commissioner Davis asked if there were any two-story homes that were affected by the .50 ratio.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated in Attachment 4 any of the blue colored lots that exceed that are two-story lots. If you used a lot coverage standard and calculated at .40 instead, the results would be similar to Column 10.

Commissioner Bratt stated he is still concerned about the visual effect of all this. He asked if they would be allowed to add a condition stating that after the first few homes were constructed and their impact analyzed, if it was deemed negative, the City could require additional landscaping installed to minimize the impact.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated the landscaping for each lot will be reviewed at DPRB but they would have to be consistent with the adopted landscaping guidelines.

Chairman Schoonover opened the meeting for public hearing. Addressing the Commission was:

Stan Stringfellow, Applicant, 2011 E. Financial Way #203, Glendora, representing NJD, stated he appreciated all of Staff's work on this issue and their willingness to support the addition of the architectural element. He felt they were not creating two-story structures; they are talking about raising the roofline from 25 feet to 35 feet, so the element was really only a one-and-one-half story element. He stated they have worked very hard to avoid the mistakes made in developments like Gordon Highlands by using setbacks and visually screening the structures. He stated the maximum house size on the custom lots was determined by Fire Department water flow regulations, and not the lot size. He stated they also designated the location of some of the semi-custom lots on how they would fit into the development and not necessarily on their lot size, so some of those lots would be very difficult to put a 15,600 square foot home on. He stated in regards to concerns expressed by Commissioner Davis, the Design Guidelines set some limits on the accessory buildings.

He felt the two viable options would be using either the pad coverage or lot coverage for the FAR, but one of the reasons they established the size of the homes was economics, and they did not want to see whatever standard is applied to reduce the livable area of the houses. He would like to propose language for their consideration which would agree to a .50 FAR coverage of the pad surface for the first floor livable area of the primary structure and any accessory structures other than sports courts, pools, etc. He felt this would work with the equestrian lots because owners will want to build a barn, but they won't be able to exceed 50% of the lot coverage. In regards to how the architectural elements would be designed, they will have to be consistent with the style of architecture so he did not think you would see something that was only 10' x 90' on any of the structures, and that the second-story elements would not exceed 30 feet in height.

There being no further comments, the public hearing was closed.

In response to Commissioner Bratt, **Assistant City Manager Stevens** stated in his version the entire floor area would be counted in the FAR; in the Applicant's version it is a variation on Option 3 and more of a pad coverage standard.

Chairman Schoonover stated in the staff report the height limit in the Specific Plan adopted in 2010 was 25 feet, and asked what the General Plan said in relation to that.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated he thought it just said one-story and did not quantify it with a number.

Chairman Schoonover stated he thought with the 2010 revision a height limit was specified in the General Plan. He asked what the height limit was in other zones.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated he did not recall there being an actual number discussed in 2010, just that the houses would be one-story. He stated the 35 foot limit was set as a cap, which is a standard height for two-story houses in other zones. Since there are no other zones that limit structures to only one-story in height, there is no designation other than 35 feet for two-stories.

Commissioner Davis stated it appears they have two issues to address; to allow the architectural element or not, and the coverage issue. On the coverage issue, he liked the Applicant's proposal of using .50 for all the buildings on the pad because he thought that might be a little more restrictive for the accessory buildings than using Option 2.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated .50 is fairly generous for pad coverage, and when you look at other zones in the City, .40 is the maximum for all buildings.

Commissioner Davis stated that .40 coverage is for the lot, not the pad. He concurred with Staff that the architectural elements will make the community more interesting and not have a negative visual effect, so he would be in support of allowing them.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated he did not calculate the difference between the pad to the lot, but most of the lots are at least 20% larger than the pads. He clarified things like pools and sports courts are not included in the coverage calculations unless they are enclosed and indoor facilities. He stated that in regards to this not creating a negative visual impact, as pointed out at the last meeting, once the grading is done that will have more of a negative visual impact than the houses themselves.

Commissioner Ensberg stated as discussed at the last meeting he felt this would not have a visual impact from outside of the project, and that adding the FAR standard as Staff has suggested will help alleviate some of the concerns expressed by the other Commissioners, and would be in support of allowing both the architectural element and setting FAR standards. He stated he would not object to either Staff's recommendation or the suggestion from the Applicant.

Commissioner Bratt stated he favored Option 1 for the FAR standard because it included all floor area and not just the first floor, and it would alleviate some of his concerns. He would still like to see some type of condition to be able to require additional landscaping if the houses are found to create some type of negative visual impact after construction.

Commissioner Rahi stated he is in support of Staff's recommendation but wasn't sure about the wording regarding habitable and non-habitable. He stated he wanted the applicant to have maximum flexibility but also control visual impact.

Assistant City Manager Stevens went over different scenarios regarding separating the calculations, and explained that you could run into problems if someone wanted to convert space that was originally non-habitable into habitable, and felt it was better to merge the two areas into one calculation. Having a FAR standard will warn future buyers that they may not be able to build the lot to the maximum square footage. In regards to Commissioner Bratt's desire to possibly require additional landscaping after construction, they can't add a condition for after construction. However, after the first few homes are built, they can review what kind of impact they have and if it seems like more screening is needed, they can condition it on future homes to be built.

Chairman Schoonover stated when this came before them in 2010 they made changes to the General Plan and Specific Plan to make this project workable. After discussing the number of two-story and one-story houses to allow and the height of each, they set a number and both plans were amended to reflect that. He felt this was an attempt to further erode the General Plan by now allowing one-story houses to go up to 30 feet. He still felt a good architect can design interesting houses without having to raise the height. If they were going to allow one of the options, he concurred with Commissioner Bratt to use Option 1 and look at the pad area.

Commissioner Davis felt the difference between the two options only impacts lots 26, 40 and 41 that have relatively small pads and they would be negatively impacted by Option 1.

Commissioner Ensberg felt there seemed to be some support to allow the architectural element but that the Commission wants some type of control placed so it doesn't get out of hand. He felt they should let Staff work on creating a policy that will achieve both ideals.

Commissioner Davis stated possibly Staff could prepare another chart for them to review that compared Option 1 with the Applicant's proposal.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated he could do that with the focus on using the pad as a basis for coverage.

Commissioner Bratt stated he wanted all the floor area to be considered because he felt if they only looked at the first floor, it would not address his concerns about the architectural element. He understood it may not be fair for the two-story homes, but felt the FAR should include all the floor area.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated ultimately if they did use only the first floor, they would only get an extra .10 for coverage. The other consideration would be the setbacks when deciding which option to use, as there is a process that you can request a reduction of the setback on a case-by-case basis.

MOTION: Moved by Davis, second by Bratt to continue the public hearing to May 16, 2013 and direct Staff to bring back a resolution which includes specific ordinance language and give the option of selecting how the pad coverage language is calculated. Motion carried unanimously, 5-0.

ORAL COMMUNICATION

3. Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated they had advertised the proposed RV storage facility at Baseline and San Dimas Canyon Roads for the next meeting, but the Applicant has requested a continuance to try and resolve some issues brought up at the DPRB meeting first. Once that is done, it will be re-scheduled for another date.

4. Members of the Audience

No communications were made.

5. Planning Commission

Commissioner Davis asked how compliance with the new sign ordinance was progressing.

Assistant City Manager Stevens stated there is only one location that has not complied and Code Enforcement is in the process of sending them a citation. There is a group of brokers and lessees that are trying to put together an alternative regulation because they do not like the current standards, but they have not been able to come to an agreement on what that should be. If they do submit something, Staff will bring that to the Commission to review.

In response to Commissioner Rahi, he stated he met with the County regarding who should have lead agency status for processing the environmental documents for the Tzu Chi project, and they were agreeable to letting the City be the lead agency. He explained how the process would work. He is also contacting LAFCO about the potential for annexation and to see how they would view a request that did not include the residential portion to the west and presented various scenarios that may occur.

Commissioner Bratt stated he will be out of town and unable to attend the June 20, 2013 meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Moved by Ensberg, seconded by Davis to adjourn. Motion carried 5-0. The meeting adjourned at 8:52 p.m. to the regular Planning Commission meeting scheduled for Thursday, May 16, 2013, at 7:00 p.m.

Jim Schoonover, Chairman
San Dimas Planning Commission

ATTEST:

Jan Sutton
Planning Commission Secretary

Approved: May 16, 2013