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APPEAL to Planning Commission
CHC Ruling for 635 Loma Avenue

March 20, 2019

The Belmont Heights Community Association (BHCA) is opposed to the recent approval of 995' sq. second story to an existing 1,077' sq. bungalow in the Belmont Heights Historic District (BHHD) is contradictory to, and not in compliance with the Historic Guidelines for the District and with the Secretary of Interior Standards set forth by the Federal government. These local guidelines and National Standards govern all new construction, rehabilitation and renovations in Landmark Districts in the City.

The BHCA understands that many original bungalows are small. The Historic Guidelines provide for prudent expansions to accommodate growing families and contemporary needs. Expanding to the rear and even modest second story additions are often allowed when they meet the HD guidelines. This particular design, however, pushes these guidelines outside the intention to protect the surrounding historic district. Specifically, the size and location of the second story (as proposed) does not meet the following guidelines:

GUIDELINE 3.1, p. 29 – “The addition should not envelop or be larger overall than the existing building, and should be no wider than the existing footprint. The addition should reasonably blend with and complement the existing pitch and shape of the roof.”

COMMENT - The proposed design adds 995' sq. atop a 1,077' sq. bungalow,¹ as well as another 387' sq. to the first story. City staff did not recommend approval of the design as it stands. Again, the BHCA understands and supports the desire of the applicant to expand the home, but only with a much less visible second story addition.

GUIDELINE 3.1 p. 29-30 – “Additions should always add to the existing footprint of the building; new construction should never involve removal of a portion of the original residence or site features. All additions should be planned and constructed carefully so that they do not cause damage to the historic building—for example, if you were to someday remove the addition, would the original building remain intact?” **COMMENT** – The proposed second addition sits atop much of the original first story. Any future removal of that addition would damage the original structure.

¹ Note, the Los Angeles Assessor lists this bungalow as 980' sq. The architectural drawings indicate the existing bungalow is 1,077' sq.



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The Staff Report makes additional negative findings with which the BHCA concurs:

“That the new second story would be highly visible from the public right-of-way (Loma Avenue) and that the addition is not compatible in scale or massing established for the primary residence or the surrounding neighborhood context.”

“That the original bungalow would be unrecognizable as a record of its time” (note: being a ‘record of its time’ is the point of contributing structures in a Historic District). Additionally, the majority of this block of Loma Avenue is comprised primarily of single-story Craftsman-bungalow homes. As proposed, the second story would disrupt the visual character of the area. Note: Again, the BHCA does NOT oppose a second story or additional square-footage to the rear of the house. The concern is that the second story is highly visible from the front/street.

The BHCA board and residents of the Belmont Heights Historic District do not take appeals lightly, but the Association seeks to uphold established zoning, ordinances, and guidelines when necessary. In this case, the BHCA Board and BHHD residents recognize and appreciate that the applicant did reduce, by 150’ sq., the size of the second story, and set back a portion of that second story from the January design to the March design; however, the March design still displays a second-story prominence, and its high visibility disrupts the visual continuity of the adjacent single-story bungalows.

A reasonable solution would be for the applicant to move the second story back so that it visually recedes from street-visibility, so the design would be more compatible with the BHHD Guidelines and would protect the HD from non-historic degradation. This solution has been adopted by other property owners within the Belmont Heights neighborhood so that they are able to have comfortable homes but still meet the historic guidelines. We are happy to provide examples upon request.

For these reasons, the BHCA strongly opposes the CHC decision that goes against the established local and Federal Standards and, we respectfully request the reconsideration of this matter by the Planning Commission.