



CITY OF LONG BEACH

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

333 West Ocean Blvd., 5th Floor

Long Beach, CA 90802

(562) 570-6194

FAX (562) 570-6068

May 16, 2019

CHAIR AND PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

City of Long Beach

California

RECOMMENDATION:

Deny the appeal (APL 19-003) and uphold the decision of the Cultural Heritage Commission to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for the construction of a first-story and second-story addition to an existing single-story residence located at 635 Loma Avenue in the Belmont Heights Historic District (District 3)

Or;

Grant the appeal (APL19-003), overturn the decision of the Cultural Heritage Commission and uphold the original staff recommendation to deny the Certificate of Appropriateness requesting to construct a first-story and second-story addition to an existing single-story residence located at 635 Loma Avenue in the Belmont Heights Historic District (District 3)

APPELLANTS: Belmont Heights Community Association - President Will Cullin
375 Redondo Avenue, Unit #332
Long Beach, CA. 90814

APPLICANT: Danielle Zunzunegui – Jeannette Architects
209 Temple Avenue
Long Beach, CA 90803
(Application No. HP18-512)

DISCUSSION

On March 11, 2019, the Cultural Heritage Commission approved a Certificate of Appropriateness permitting the construction of a first and second story addition to an existing single-story residence located at 635 Loma Avenue. The property is a contributing structure within the Belmont Heights Historic District (Exhibit A – Location Map). On March 20, 2019, the Belmont Heights Community Association filed an appeal of this Certificate of Appropriateness (Exhibit B – Appeal). The appeal specified general opposition to the project with regards to the size and location of the second story addition.

Pursuant to Section 2.63.100 of the Municipal Code, the appeal of a Cultural Heritage Commission decision shall be heard by the Planning Commission. As the appeal body, the

Planning Commission can affirm, reverse, or modify the action of the Cultural Heritage Commission decision and may add conditions of approval as it deems reasonably necessary. The decision of the Planning Commission on appeal shall be final.

This particular case is highly unusual in that staff originally recommended that the Cultural Heritage Commission (CHC) deny the requested Certificate of Appropriateness. After multiple hearings and revisions to the project the CHC modified the staff recommendation of denial and instead approved the applicant's revised plans. None of the circumstances leading to staff's recommendation of denial have changed, however the CHC, not planning staff, is empowered to render decisions in these cases based on the commission's professional judgement and experience. The decisions of the CHC should be respected and given some deference. The role of the Planning Commission is to consider whether the Cultural Heritage Commission erred or abused their discretion in this matter. To that end, this report attempts to provide a complete background on the case and contrasting factors for the Planning Commission to balance and consider.

Property History

The subject property is located on the west side of Loma Avenue between East 7th Street to the north and East 6th Street to the south. The site is located within the Single Family Residential – Standard Lots (R-1-N) Zoning District. Based on City records, the primary residence was originally developed as a 1,077-square-foot one-story residence with a detached one-car garage which were built in 1922. The existing single-story primary residence was built in the Craftsman architectural style – a style which constitutes approximately two-thirds of the Belmont Heights Historic District. The residence has a combination roof consisting of a roof ridge that spans the width of the home with clipped gables at opposite ends of the roof ridge, and a cross-gable front facing gable over the porch. Composition shingles, and horizontal wood-siding are the materials used on the exterior of both the primary residence and the detached two-car garage. (Exhibit C – Photos).

While the structures on the property maintain their original size and configuration, there have been multiple improvements over time. All work was completed prior to the adoption of the Belmont Heights Historic District in 2002 (Ordinance No. C-7802).

1. In 1952, the original one-garage car was demolished and replaced with a 460-square-foot two-car garage that exists today.
2. In 1996, the City issued building permits and a Certificate of Occupancy for the replacement of wood siding throughout the property, and the replacement of 20 windows on the primary residence.
3. In 1998, the homeowner obtained building permits to replace the siding, garage door, and windows of the detached garage to match the primary residence.
4. The existing front porch columns were likely modified in the 1960s or 1970s to be simple square posts.

ANALYSIS

The City of Long Beach is recognized by the State Office of Historic Preservation as a Certified Local Government (CLG) which means that the City's Historic Preservation program meets the highest standards for local government historic preservation programs. One standard required for CLG cities is that their Cultural Heritage Commission include qualified historic preservation professionals on the Commission. The Cultural Heritage Commission is the City Commission responsible for reviewing modifications to historic landmark buildings and historic district properties. A Certificate of Appropriateness is the type of application used by the Planning Bureau for such requests to modify historic buildings that are located within adopted historic districts or individually designated historic landmark buildings. These applications have their own findings of fact to be made which align with those used by the State and read as follows:

1. Will not adversely affect any significant historical, cultural, architectural or aesthetic feature of the Landmark or subject property within the Landmark District and that issuance of the Certificate of Appropriateness is consistent with the spirit and intent of this Chapter.
2. Will remedy any condition determined to be imminently dangerous or unsafe by the Fire Marshal and/or Building Official.
3. Will comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings.
4. Will comply with the Design Guidelines for Landmark Districts for a property located within a Landmark District.

In addition to satisfying the above Certificate of Appropriateness criteria, the project must meet the zone-specific development standards in the zoning ordinance, and the project is reviewed under Finding No. 4 for compliance with the Belmont Heights Historic District Design Guidelines. Per finding No. 3, the project must also meet the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation which are national guidelines used by historic preservation professionals throughout the country.

Prior to submittal of the Certificate of Appropriateness application, staff had numerous discussions and correspondence with the applicant regarding design considerations and potential constraints to any addition at the subject property. Staff discouraged the applicant from filing this two-story addition as designed, citing that the design was not consistent with the adopted historic district design guidelines. On January 14, 2019, the Cultural Heritage Commission held an initial public hearing to consider this project. At that meeting, staff made a presentation to the Commission and recommended denial of the project. The Commission, after hearing all public testimony regarding concerns about project massing, continued the hearing and directed staff to hold a Commission

subcommittee meeting to consider project modifications to address the Commission's concerns regarding design of the second-story addition (Exhibit D – CHC Staff Report & Plans 1/14/19). On February 19, 2019, a subcommittee meeting of the Commission was held, and guidance was provided to the applicant to vary the setback of portions of the 2nd story addition, resulting in a larger setback to a portion of the 2nd floor and allowing another portion of the addition to extend forward toward the front of the original structure. The recommendation was intended to create a varied second floor façade appearance with the intention to reduce the massing.

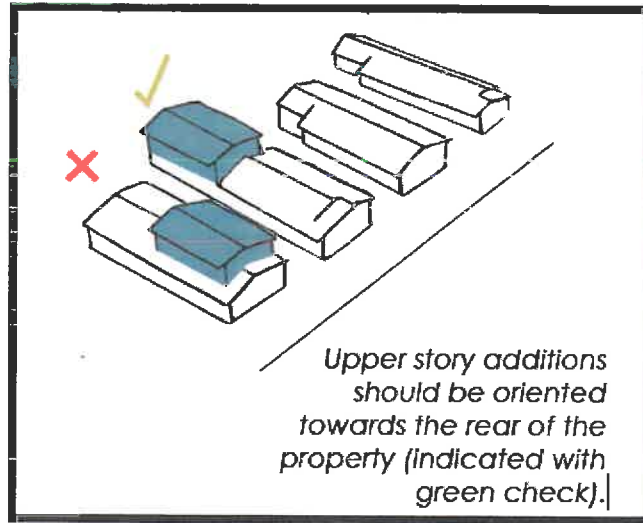
At the Cultural Heritage Commission hearing on March 11, 2019, staff presented a staff report which recommended denial of the project based on staff's determination that the revised design did not sufficiently comply with all standards (Exhibit E – CHC Staff Report & Plans 3/11/19). The Cultural Heritage Commission concluded the public hearing by recommending approval of the project subject to specific conditions of approval. The conditions of approval include a design modification to soften design details of the building that result in a less architecturally detailed building consistent with the neighborhood character.

The appeal specified general opposition to the project with regards to the size and location of the second story addition. The appeal indicates that the project is contrary to the Belmont Heights Design Guidelines as it relates to massing of the addition, removal of historic materials, visibility of the addition and the ability to recognize the structure as a record in time. The appeal further states that the staff report found that the proposed project did not comply with required findings of compliance with district guidelines and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards because of the prominence of the proposed second story addition, its visibility from the public right of way and the location of the addition resulting in the original shape of the structure being unrecognizable. Additionally, the appeal states that the second story addition would disrupt the visual character of the area, as this block of Loma Avenue is comprised primarily of single-story Craftsman bungalow homes.

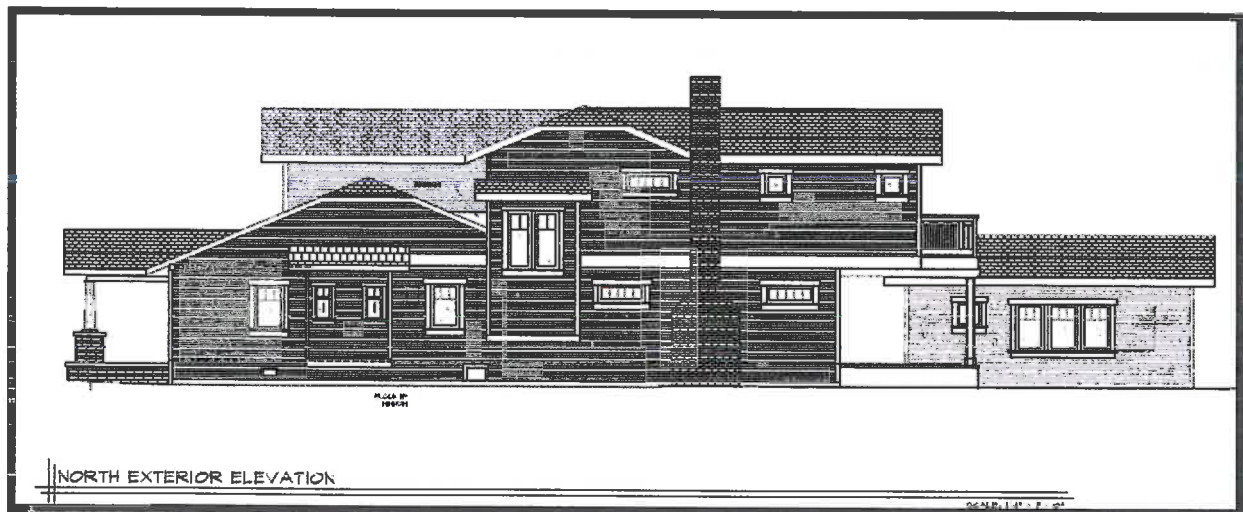
The Belmont Heights Historic District Design Guidelines states that upper story additions may be acceptable for some residences in the Belmont Heights Historic District. It also states the following:

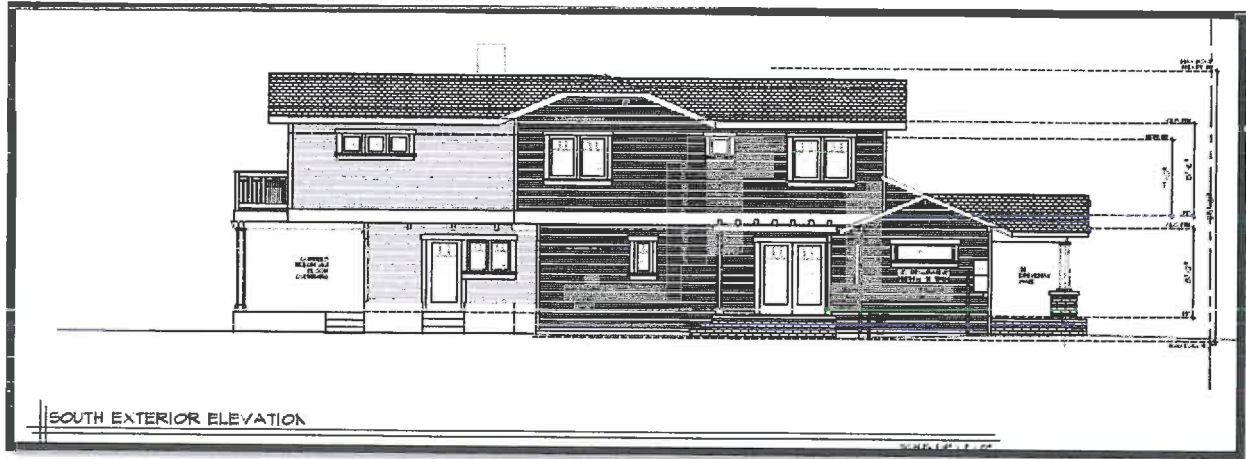
1. Size and massing of upper story additions should be compatible with the character of the residence.
2. Upper story additions be planned and constructed in a way that does not involve removing, obstructing or damaging any existing historic features.
3. The addition should not envelope or be larger overall than the existing building and should be no wider than the existing footprint.

The Guidelines also include visually illustrated guidance for second-floor additions. The graphic below identifies what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate placement of an upper story addition for historic district properties.



The revised plans reflect the varied second floor massing (Exhibit F – Plans). The north elevation (side elevation) shows a substantially recessed second floor setback. This elevation illustrates the spatial relationship of the addition to the original structure and more closely resembles the guidance provided the Belmont Heights Design Guidelines. However, the south elevation (side elevation) shows the proposed second floor addition which protrudes further toward the front more closely reflects the guidance of inappropriate placement of second floor additions and is the reason why staff could not make the finding (Finding No. 4) that this project meets the Belmont Heights Design Guidelines. The plans are shown in drawings below:





Staff's analysis of the project included a review of surrounding properties on this block to identify the visual pattern of this street which is primarily one-story. The block consists of 23 total houses which were constructed between 1905-1936 and 16 of the 23 structures were constructed within a 5-year period between 1918-1923. Architecturally, the block is predominately made up of one-story Craftsman style buildings. A diagram of the block was prepared to show the context of one-story and two-story buildings on this block as shown below:



Of the 23 houses on this block, 20 have single-stories located at the front of the property. Nearly all properties on the west side of the block of Loma Avenue feature one-story primary structures, with only two residential properties to the north having a second story, and these second story structures are located in the rear of the property. On the opposite side of Loma Avenue, five of eleven total residences have second stories, but only two of these properties have a second story on the primary residence. The one-story buildings along this block establish a visual pattern of one-story structures. The proposed two-story addition would

disrupt the visual continuity and character of the street. As proposed the addition envelops the overall structure which is not in consistent with the Finding No. 1. The addition will adversely affect the historic, architectural and aesthetic features of the historic district.

Staff concluded that the project does not meet the Design Guidelines taken from the Belmont Heights Historic District Design Guidelines and Finding No.1 and 4 cannot be made in support of the Certificate of Appropriateness (Exhibit G – Findings). Staff's review also considered review of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation Standard No. 3 states that "each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken. The second story addition would result in the existing residence being unrecognizable as a record of its time as a one-story Craftsman Bungalow. The illustrated guidance from the Design Guidelines for appropriate second floor additions purposely places the addition at the rear of the existing building to retain the look and feel of the original bungalow.

It is important to note however that the CHC is empowered to and did consider factors beyond staff's analysis. The commission credited the applicant with an improved quality design and considered an alternative design that the applicant felt would be consistent with staff direction but result in an inferior building. The CHC considered the resulting loss of open space from a larger one-story addition consuming more of the lot's rear yard and found those tradeoffs to be unacceptable. Lastly, the CHC considered the presence of two-story structures including those with front-loaded massing within greater Belmont Heights while staff's analysis focused on the specific block where the subject property sits.

Unlike typical cases staff cannot provide the Planning Commission with a clear direction or recommendation. Rather, in this case, the Planning Commission must independently weigh the evidence considered by the CHC, presented in the appeal, as well as supporting materials from staff and come to some judgement and conclusion.

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

A total of 875 public hearing notices were distributed on April 30, 2019, in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 21.21 of the Long Beach Municipal Code. At the time of writing of this report, staff has received no public inquiries on this project.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

In accordance with the Guidelines for Implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act, this project is exempt per Section 15303 (New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures).

CHAIR AND PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

May 16, 2019

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Respectfully submitted,

ALEJANDRO PLASCENCIA
PRESERVATION PLANNER

PATRICIA A. DIEFENDERFER, AICP
ADVANCE PLANNING OFFICER

CHRISTOPHER KOONTZ, AICP
PLANNING BUREAU MANAGER

LINDA F. TATUM, FAICP
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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Attachments:

- Exhibit A – Location Map
- Exhibit B – Appeal
- Exhibit C – Photos
- Exhibit D – CHC Staff Report & Plans & Minutes 1/14/19
- Exhibit E – CHC Staff Report & Minutes 3/11/19
- Exhibit F – Plans
- Exhibit G – Findings 1
- Exhibit H – Findings 2