

Planning Commission Staff Report

April 13, 2011
Item 6.a.

SUBJECT:	PREV-781
APPLICANT:	Charles Huff
PROPERTY OWNER:	David and Francine Cunningham
PURPOSE:	Work session to review and receive comments on a Preliminary Review application to demolish the existing residence and to construct a new, approximately 1,862 square-foot, two-story residence.
LOCATION:	205 Neal Street
GENERAL PLAN:	Medium Density Residential – 2 to 8 dwelling units per gross acre
SPECIFIC PLAN:	Downtown Specific Plan
ZONING:	R-1-6,500 (One-Family Residential) District
EXHIBITS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A. Discussion QuestionsB. Site Plans, Floor Plans, Elevation Drawings, and photos dated “Received March 9, 2011”C. Preliminary Review Letters from StaffD. Historic Evaluation dated “Received March 9, 2011”E. Location and Noticing MapsF. Public CommentsG. Comment Letters from the PHA

BACKGROUND

In March of 2009, Charles Huff, on behalf of the property owners, submitted a Preliminary Review application requesting the City consider the property owners’ request to demolish the existing single-story residence and construct a new two-story home prior to submitting a formal Design Review application. Staff provided Mr. Huff with a comment letter that discussed the site development standards (i.e., setbacks, separation, etc.), the design of the home, the proposed parking, the need for an historic evaluation, and retaining the home versus demolishing it.

In response to the 2009 comment letter, Mr. Huff submitted two additional Preliminary Review applications in 2010; however, the applications were similar to the initial request and, therefore, staff's comments remained the same. Staff has included the Preliminary Review letters in Exhibit C for the Commission's consideration.

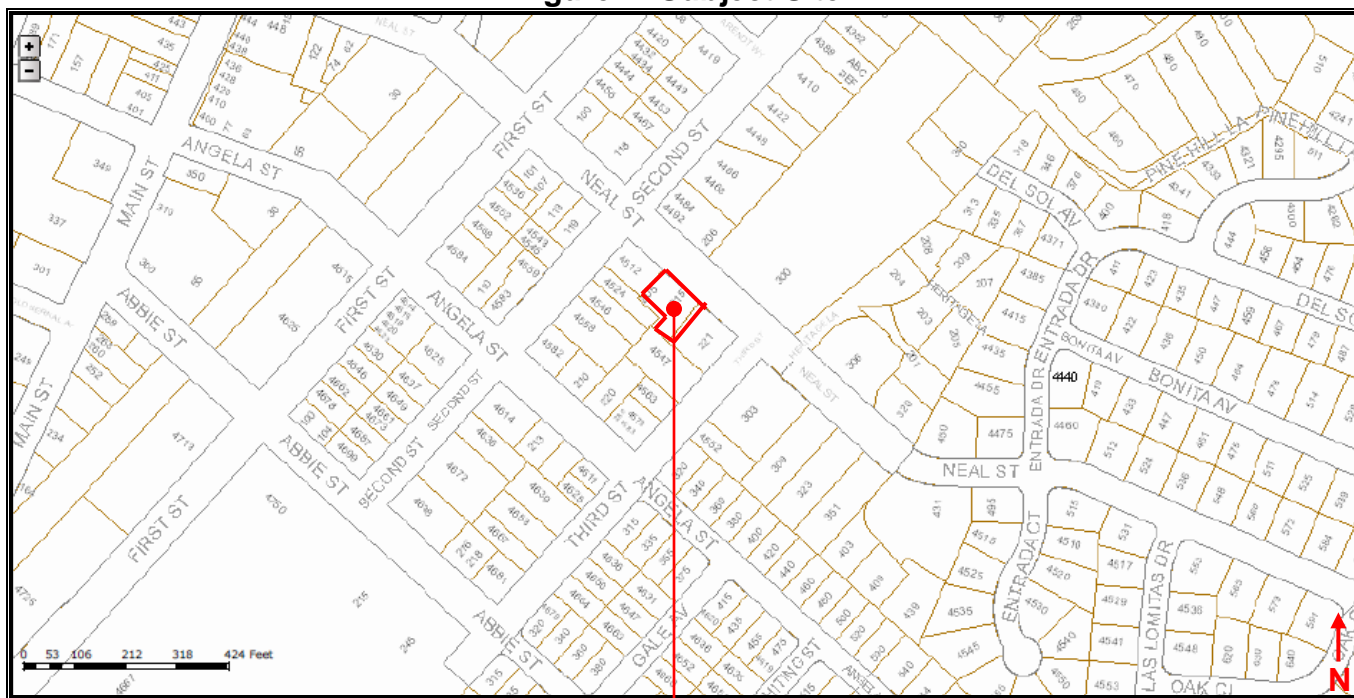
Applications to construct a new single-family home are processed at staff level with action taken by the Zoning Administrator. Because staff would not support an application based on this development proposal and since the applicant would file an appeal to the Planning Commission should staff deny a formal application, staff and the applicant therefore request that the Planning Commission review, comment, and provide direction on the applicant's historic evaluation, demolition of the home, variance requests, and the architectural style of the proposed home prior to submittal of the Design Review and Variance applications.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The subject site is a Downtown residential interior lot located on the south side of Neal Street. The site is approximately 9,428 square-feet in area and gradually inclines as it progresses east towards Third Street. The properties located south and west of the subject site contain two-story residences and the site east of 215 Neal Street, currently under construction, will be a two-story residence. There is one two-story residence (215 Neal Street) and one single-story residence (205 Neal Street, the subject dwelling) on the site; however, neither home is considered a second dwelling unit (Please refer to Figure 1 on page 3). The two dwellings that exist on the property are pre-existing non-conforming in that there are two pre-existing units on one lot zoned R-1-6,500. Therefore, neither house is subject to the Zoning Ordinance provisions for second units; new construction would follow the site development standards of the R-1-6,500 District for a main dwelling unit.

Please refer to the next page for Figure 1

Figure 1: Subject Site



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Except for retaining the east elevation wall, approximately 20-feet in length, Mr. Huff is proposing to demolish the approximately 482 square-foot single-story home and construct an approximately 1,862 square-foot two-story home with tandem parking in front of the proposed attached single-car garage. Staff notes that although the east elevation wall will be retained, staff considers the proposal to be a complete demolition of the house. The proposal is subject to the development standards of the R-1-6,500 Zoning District. As proposed, the project would not comply with all of the development standards or parking requirements of the R-1-6,500 Zoning District. Specifically, Variances from the Pleasanton Municipal Code would be required to: 1) reduce the front yard setback to accommodate the new house, second-floor balcony, and porch steps; 2) reduce the separation setback between an adjacent structure; 3) allow tandem parking; and 4) allow a required off-street parking space to be located in the required front yard. Please refer to the “Variance Requests” section of this report for further discussion on the necessary Variances.

Figure 2: 205 Neal Street



Figure 3: Proposed New Home



CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE WORK SESSION

Staff is presenting the Commission with the conceptual plans (Exhibit B) for consideration and comments. This workshop will allow the Planning Commission the opportunity to provide direction to the applicant and staff regarding the project. The topics and questions below (noted in ***bold italic***) are those of which staff would find the Commission's input most helpful. The questions have also been included as Exhibit A of this report.

Demolition and Historic Evaluation

The Downtown Specific Plan (DTSP) has a policy that states:

“Require the completion of the State of California Department of Parks and Recreation Survey Form-523 to develop and document a statement of historic significance prior to the issuance of demolition permits for any historic resource older than 50 years. Evaluate these properties using the State of California criteria for the California Register of Historic Resources.”

The DTSP also has the following policy that states:

“Prohibit the demolition of any building found to be historically significant with regard to the California Register criteria unless such building is determined by the Chief Building Official to be unsafe or dangerous, and if no other reasonable means of rehabilitation or relocation can be achieved.”

The Downtown Design Guidelines also discourage the demolition of buildings over 50 years of age and encourage remodeling over replacing (i.e., demolishing) structures. The house at 215 Neal Street was built in 1890 and is listed in the Downtown Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report as an historic resource. The structure is also listed as an historic structure in the General Plan. In 2003, the City hired Architectural Resource Group (ARG) to complete Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) survey forms for several Downtown properties, including 215 Neal Street. The DPR survey indicates that the house at 215 Neal Street has a

high level of integrity and has an even greater level of significance since it was associated with one of Pleasanton's early families. No mention was made of the smaller house at 205 Neal Street. Staff notes that there are no City records that indicate when 205 Neal Street was constructed. Therefore, a historic evaluation/DPR form for the smaller house would need to be conducted in order to evaluate the request for demolition.

Staff informed Mr. Huff that the historic evaluation would need to be prepared by an architectural historian who has previously prepared such evaluations for the City or by someone who has demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Director of Community Development that they meet the qualifications stated in the Secretary of the Interior's and the State Office of Historic Preservation's professional qualification standards. For the Commission's consideration, Exhibit D is the historic evaluation prepared by the applicant.

Direction Requested

- 1. Would the Planning Commission support the demolition of the house at 205 Neal Street?**

- 2. Does the Planning Commission find the historic evaluation, prepared by the applicant, acceptable?**

Variance Requests

The property is located in the R-1-6,500 zoning district which requires: 1) a minimum lot area of 6,500 square-feet, 2) a minimum lot depth of 100-feet, and 3) a minimum lot width of 65-feet. However, in 2006 a Variance application (PV-148) was approved for 215 Neal Street to allow a lot depth of 80-feet where a 100-foot minimum is required. The depth of the lot was reduced as a result of a corresponding Lot Line Adjustment application (PLLA-84) between 215 Neal Street and 221 Neal Street. The Lot Line Adjustment transferred 1,646 square-feet from 215 to 221 Neal Street by adjusting the common side property line, which reduced the total square-footage of 215 Neal Street to 9,428 square-feet in area.

Although the depth of the lot was reduced, new construction would still have to comply with the development standards and parking requirements of the R-1-6,500 Zoning District for a main dwelling unit. As proposed, the new home would comply with the height, FAR, and rear and side yard setbacks; however, Variances from the Pleasanton Municipal Code would be required in regards to the front yard setback, structure-to-structure separation, and parking. The development standards for a main structure and parking requirements for the R-1-6,500 Zoning District are noted below with the proposed standards noted in *italic* thereafter:

- Height: 30-foot maximum, measured from finished grade to the midpoint of the roof.
25-feet, measured from finished grade to the highest point of the roof.

- Setbacks: Front = 23-foot minimum for main structures, 12-feet for covered porches and unroofed steps (standards noted below*), and 15-feet for second-floor balconies;

Rear = 20-foot minimum (exception below**); Sides = 5-foot minimum on one side/12-foot minimum total combined side yards.

Front = 20-feet for the main structure, 12-feet for the covered porch and 9-feet, 6-inches for the unroofed steps*, and 12-feet for the balcony; Rear = 15-feet**; Sides = 5-feet/73-feet combined.*

*Section 18.84.120 C allows unroofed steps to come to a point not closer than 12-feet to a front property line, or may project not more than eight feet into a required front yard, provided that the height, including railings, shall not exceed six feet above the grade of the ground at the property line.

Section 18.84.120 F states that covered front porches may come to a point not closer than 12-feet from the front property line, provided that the covered front porch is designed to be an integral part of the home, is open on three sides, has a minimum depth of eight feet, and has a minimum width of 10-feet. Porch eaves may project no more than an additional 24-inches into the required front and/or side yard setback areas.

**Section 18.84.090.E permits one-story portions of a new home to be setback to within 15-feet of the rear property line provided there remains a single unobstructed open space area of 1,560 square-feet in the side or rear yards which has a minimum dimension of not less than 15-feet.

- Separation: At the time of initial construction, a main structure exceeding 15-feet in height shall be separated at least 20-feet from another main structure exceeding 15-feet in height; however, if only one of the main structures exceeds 15-feet in height, then a 17-foot minimum separation is required. One-and two-story additions can be built with the same separation as the existing dwelling.

There is a minimum of 8-feet of separation between the existing house at 215 Neal Street and the proposed one-story walls of the proposed house.

- Floor Area Ratio (FAR): 40% maximum, measured by adding the total area of the homes (205 and 215 Neal Street) and accessory buildings on the lot, excluding garage areas used for required off-street parking, divided by the lot area.

1,778 square-feet (215 Neal Street) + 126 square-feet (accessory building behind 215 Neal Street) + 1,826 square-feet (proposed residence) = 3,766 square-feet / 9,428 (lot area) = 39.94%.

- Parking: A single-family dwelling is required to provide two off-street parking spaces, one which is covered (i.e., in a garage or carport) with tandem parking and parking in the front yard setback not being allowed.

Attached single-car garage with uncovered tandem parking located in the front yard setback. Staff notes that 205 Neal Street currently has two existing, nonconforming uncovered tandem spaces along the west side of the house. This existing, nonconforming condition may remain as long as these spaces are not removed or altered.

Given the development standards, the proposal would require the following Variances from the Pleasanton Municipal Code:

- Reduce the front yard setback from the required 23-feet to 20-feet for the new house.
- Reduce the front yard setback from the required 15-feet to 12-feet for the second-floor balcony.
- Reduce the front yard setback from the required 12-feet to 9-feet, 6-inches for the front porch steps.
- Reduce the separation between one-story structures from the required 10-feet to 8-feet between 205 and 215 Neal Street.
- Allow tandem parking. Staff notes that the Variance for the tandem parking is required because the existing non-conforming tandem spaces are being altered (i.e., relocated). If the existing, non-conforming tandem parking spaces are not altered, a variance would not be required. However, it is not feasible to retain the existing tandem parking given the proposed setbacks of the home and an alternative design would be required to accommodate the existing tandem parking, and
- Allow a required parking space in the front yard setback.

The lot is approximately 9,482 square-feet in area, has a depth of approximately 80-feet, and a width of approximately 105-feet (as defined by the Pleasanton Municipal Code). The subject lot exceeds the minimum lot area and width, but is substandard in depth for a lot in the R-1-6,500 Zoning District. The lot inclines towards the east of the property; however, the western portion of the lot – the location of the proposed development – is relatively flat. The lot has minimal topographical limitations and, although it has a somewhat atypical shape, it is unlikely that the lot deprives the property of privileges enjoyed by other properties in a R-1-6,500 Zoning District. Furthermore, the Downtown Specific Plan states:

“Protect the established size and spacing of buildings in residential neighborhoods by avoiding excessive lot coverage and maintain appropriate separations between buildings.”

Direction Requested

3. Would it be appropriate to reduce the setbacks and separation requirements for the subject site?

4. Should tandem parking in the front yard setback be allowed?

Design

The Downtown Specific Plan (DTSP) states objectives and policies for historic preservation.

Objective three states:

“To ensure that the design of new buildings and modifications to existing heritage buildings and heritage neighborhoods are compatible with the Downtown’s traditional design character and scale.”

Design Policy 22 states:

“Discourage the demolition of single family homes which exceed 50 years of age. The replacement of any single family home should be compatible with the neighborhood scale and architectural style.”

The DTSP also notes that the design of new buildings should draw upon the primary exterior features of the Downtown’s traditional design character in terms of architectural style and materials, colors, details of construction, height, floor area, bulk, massing, and setbacks. These elements should be consistent with those elements of buildings in the immediate neighborhood, and the design of the new buildings should not represent a significant departure from the existing neighborhood character. Furthermore, the DTSP and the Downtown Design Guidelines (DDG) have design criteria for garage placement.

DTSP Design Policy 20 states:

“Encourage garages at the rear of lots.”

DDG states:

“Place garages in the rear of lots.”

In general, staff finds that the existing house at 205 Neal Street to be quaint and adds character to the Downtown residential area. Therefore, staff recommends that the smaller house be retained (even if it is determined not to be historic) and added onto rather than demolished. However, if the property owners wish to pursue the demolition and construction of a new home, staff is of the opinion that the new house should better match the architectural

style, massing, detailing, etc. found in the older homes Downtown. Specifically, staff encourages that applicant to follow the architectural style of the house at 215 Neal Street.

The Downtown Specific Plan and Downtown Design Guidelines outline parameters related to new construction of residential structures and also provide guidance related to architectural details materials, and windows. The proposed design of the two-story home features lap wood siding and wood trim, composition shingle roofing, and belly band; which is in keeping with the parameters of the Downtown Design Guidelines. Clad wood windows are also proposed; however, the window specifications (cladding material and frame and sash thickness) were not provided and, therefore, it is not clear whether the windows would be in keeping with the Downtown Design Guidelines. The proposal also includes second-floor balconies on the front and rear of the building and a covered front porch. An attached single-car garage is proposed on the north (front) elevation with tandem parking. However, the proposal does not incorporate the following elements that are outlined in the Downtown Design Guidelines:

Height & Mass

- Reflect the general massing of surrounding homes, including roof forms and step backs, front parches, bay windows and balconies.
- Reduce mass through roof forms such as hips, dormers, small gables, and articulations such as balconies. *Staff normally encourages the second floor to be integrated into the roofline of the building and utilize dormer windows.*

Design

- New construction, additions and remodels should reflect the architectural style and detailing of the surrounding neighborhood.

Roofline

- New homes should use roof forms and materials of similarly styled homes in the neighborhood.

Entries

- Design porches or protected entryways to recall those elements found in surrounding homes.

Architectural Details

- Use masonry chimneys (brick or stone)
- New construction is to use a rich variety of detailing appropriate to the style of the building and that found in similar homes in the neighborhood. This includes elements such as roof eave, door and window trim, balconies, railings, and material accents such as tile or shingle patterns.

The design of the proposed home is a deviation from the home located at 215 Neal Street and, in staff's opinion, lacks architectural detailing. Staff finds that the site would appear better integrated if the proposed home is designed to be consistent in appearance and architecture to

the existing Gothic Revival style home at 215 Neal Street (Please refer to Figure 4 on page 10 for the home at 215 Neal Street).

Figure 4: 215 Neal Street



Figure 5: Proposal for 205 Neal Street



Direction Requested

- 5. Is the building design appropriate for the site?**
- 6. Is the attached garage located at the front of the house appropriate for the site?**

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice of this hearing for the Preliminary Review application was sent to surrounding property owners and tenants within 1,000-feet of the site (Please refer to Exhibit E for the location and noticing maps). At the time this report was published, staff received verbal comments from Dustin Boyce and Brian and Christine Bourg and e-mails from Fred and Bonnie Kirchbaum and Arnie Abrott (Please refer to Exhibit F for the emails). The verbal and written comments include concerns regarding massing, inconsistencies with the Downtown Specific Plan, Variance requests, and design. Mr. Boyce requested that a professional third party verify the square-footage and measurements (i.e., setbacks and separation) of the existing homes (205 and 215 Neal Street) prior to submitting a formal application to the City.

The property owner, Mr. Cunningham, has also provided signatures of support for the proposal that are included in Exhibit F for the Commission's consideration.

Pleasanton Heritage Association (PHA)

The PHA reviewed the plans for the proposed project and provided comments in 2010. The PHA's comments are related to the design and architecture, height, massing, and scale of the proposed home and how they believe it is not consistent with the Downtown Specific Plan and that it does not appear to be in keeping with the other structures within the immediate vicinity of the subject site. The comments in their entirety are attached as Exhibit G.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review the attached material, take public testimony, and provide comment and direction to the applicant and staff. Staff suggests the Planning Commission use the discussion points found in Exhibit A.

Staff Planner: Natalie Amos, Associate Planner, 925.931.5613, namos@ci.pleasanton.ca.us