



# CITY OF SAN MATEO

City Hall  
330 W. 20th Avenue  
San Mateo CA 94403  
[www.cityofsanmateo.org](http://www.cityofsanmateo.org)

## Agenda Report

---

Agenda Number: 2

Section Name: PUBLIC HEARING

File ID: 19-1752

---

**TO:** Planning Commission  
**FROM:** Ronald Munekawa  
**PREPARED BY:** Community Development Department  
**MEETING DATE:** October 22, 2019

**SUBJECT:**

866 Viewridge Drive - Single-Family Dwelling Design Review (SFDDR) and Special Use Permit (SUP) (PA-2016-074)

**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Planning Commission approve PA-2016-074 866 Viewridge Drive - Single-Family Dwelling Design Review and Special Use Permit by making the following motions:

- A. Find the project exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act as a Class I Section 15301 Section (I)(1) "Existing Facilities" and Class 3 Section 15303 (a) "New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures" Categorical Exemptions based on the findings attached as Attachment 1; and
- B. Approve the Single Family Dwelling Design Review (SFDDR) for the construction of a new one-story, single-family residence and a Special Use Permit (SUP) for demolition of 100 percent of the existing structure's exterior walls and new roof structures based on the Findings for Approval in Attachment 1 and subject to the Conditions of Approval in Attachment 2.

**BACKGROUND:**

**Project History**

The Planning Application was originally submitted on August 18, 2016, after a neighborhood informational meeting was held by the applicant at the project site on June 30, 2016. On February 7, 2017, a public notice of the Pending Zoning Administrator Decision soliciting public comments was mailed to approximately 106 property owners, residents, and interested parties in the City. During the public notice comment period, staff received emails and calls from neighbors raising issues related their comments made during the June neighborhood meeting. These comments included potential view impacts of the proposed roof re-pitch and hillside grading work. After discussion with the applicant, the applicant requested that the Planning Commission review this application rather than the Zoning Administrator as allowed by the Zoning Code.

The application was subsequently reviewed and approved by the Planning Commission on June 26, 2018. Shortly thereafter, a formal appeal was filed by a group of neighbors adjacent to the project site. However, this appeal was not formally heard after it was determined the original approval was based on inaccurate plans containing errors (plans showed retention of 27% of the existing exterior walls when none were retained), which invalidated the Planning Commission's decision. Subsequent to the determination regarding the plans, Planning Staff worked with the applicant over the course of approximately one year, performing numerous plan reviews to ensure the information presented in the plans was accurate and the proposed design modifications were compliant with applicable municipal code requirements.

Please see Attachment 3 for a Project Summary Timeline.

## **Site Description**

The project site is a 36,720 square-foot parcel located at 866 Viewridge Drive on the north side of Viewridge Drive. The subject property is located along a hillside which slopes downward from front to back (south to north) and slightly from left to right (west to east). Views of the San Francisco Bay can be seen to the east. The immediate neighborhood is primarily composed of traditional ranch style homes. The majority of the homes along the north side of Viewridge Drive are one-story. A Location Map is included as [Attachment 4](#).

## **Project Description**

The proposed project includes the complete demolition of the existing one-story, single-family home (100 percent of the existing exterior walls and existing roof structure) and construction of a new 4,591 square foot (sf) one-story, single-family residence. The project includes an attached 640 sf three-car garage and provides one additional uncovered parking stall located outside of the required front and side yards, for a total of four parking stalls located onsite. The applicant proposes utilizing hipped roof forms which maintain a pitch of 4:12 across the residence. The new residence is proposed at an overall maximum height of 19 feet 6 inches as measured from the finished grade to the highest roof ridge. The architectural character is changing from a style most similar to an Eichler to a traditional style. Materials include stucco, aluminum-clad wood windows, and clay S-tile roof. The Project Plans can be found in [Attachment 5](#).

The project requires two (2) planning entitlements: A Special Use Permit for the complete demolition of the existing residence and a Single Family Dwelling Design Review for construction of a new replacement single-family residence when a pre-existing single-family residence is to be substantially removed (i.e. demolition of 50 percent or more of the structure's exterior walls and/or roof structure).

## **Proposed Changes to Previously Approved Design**

The applicant proposes several modifications to the previously approved design. The primary changes include re-orientating the footprint of the residence to more closely parallel the front and side property lines; shortening the overall length of the residence by approximately 11 feet, resulting in increased views of the Peninsula at the rear of the home; reducing the total proposed square footage to 4,591 sf from 4,657 sf as originally approved ; and decreasing the total number of windows along the left elevation from eight to six to reduce privacy conflicts with the residents of 872 Viewridge Drive. Additionally, the applicant has agreed to provide privacy screening shrubs along the side property line shared with 872 Viewridge Drive to help obscure direct views into each home; see Condition #20 included in Attachment 2. specifics of the condition. While the proposed changes may not completely resolve all the expressed concerns of the property owners in immediate proximity to the project site, Staff has concluded the cumulative effect of these design modifications will lessen the viewshed impacts associated with the previously approved design.

To illustrate possible view impacts, City consultant, Robert Frank of Robert Frank Architectural Illustration was commissioned to produce photo simulations of perspectives taken from the three uphill neighbors, 872, 878, and 900 Viewridge Drive, as well as to compare the originally approved design in relation to the new proposed design. Please refer to [Attachment 6](#) for the photo simulations.

## **Applicable Code and Policy Review**

### General Plan

The General Plan Land Use Diagram designates this parcel's land use as Single Family. A list of applicable General Plan policies and a discussion of the project's compliance is included in [Attachment 1](#) Findings for Approval.

### Zoning Code

The Zoning Code land use designation for this parcel is R1-B (One Family Dwellings). The Factual Data Sheet is included as [Attachment 7](#) and shows compliance with all Zoning Code development standards. The proposed 4,591 sf of total floor area is well-below the 6,000 sf maximum floor area permitted for this property. The maximum permitted height is 32 feet with a maximum permitted plate height of 24 feet. The project proposes a maximum height of 19 feet 6 inches at the highest point, with a maximum plate height of 13 feet 1 inch.

## Issues

The project site is unique in that the existing single-family dwelling is the only home along the block that has a flat-pitched roof, as most of the adjacent homes are traditional style with 4:12 pitched roofs. As such, the project proposes utilizing the same common 4:12 pitch to better conform with the existing roof pattern found in the surrounding neighborhood. The resulting change from a flat roof form to a 4:12 pitch increases the home's overall height by approximately 5 feet 6 inches, though the proposed finished floor and perimeter plate heights match those of the existing home.

Please see the Comparative Technical Data Table provided as [Attachment 8](#) for a comparison of the existing, previously approved, and currently proposed project design.

### City of San Mateo Single-Family Dwelling Design Guidelines

The Single-Family Dwelling Design Guidelines address the construction of new (or partially replaced) single-family dwelling and second story additions to single-family dwellings, and how the building's size, architectural character, and relationship to the street and nearby houses contribute to a successful neighborhood. The principal issue raised by residents in the area pertained to view impacts due to the roof re-pitch and alteration. While the City does not have an ordinance in place to protect views, the Design Guidelines acknowledge the "most important views" are those views from primary living areas such as a living, dining, kitchen area (common areas) rather than from secondary rooms such as a bedroom or bathroom. The Guidelines suggest:

- A. Respect Established Views - Recognize established views from the primary living area of neighboring houses and design house additions to minimize blockage of those views. Possible methods include to minimize view blockage include: configuring living space where it would have less impact; increasing the setback of second-story additions; lowering roof plate heights; and choosing roof forms that minimize mass.
- B. View Equity - Neighboring views should be maintained to a similar level as that enjoyed by the proposed house addition. Balance the private rights to views from all parcels so that no single parcel should enjoy a greater view right than other similar parcels, except for the natural advantages of each site's topography.

To aid with determination as to whether the project conforms to the Guidelines, it also offers the following questions for consideration:

- What are the established views from neighboring houses?
- To what degree would the proposed addition block views from neighboring houses?
- Would the proposed addition create a greater view blockage than other homes on similar parcels in the neighborhood?
- Could the addition be designed to minimize view blockage from neighboring houses?

The section pertaining to views in the City's Single-Family Dwelling Guidelines are included as [Attachment 9](#).

### Respect Established Views

The Design Guidelines suggest designing house additions to "minimize blockage of those (established) views (from primary living areas)"; however, it does not quantify in square footage nor percentage of the amount of "blockage," or whether the "blockage" is cumulative or based on individual windows in each room. The three uphill neighbors, 872, 878, and 900 Viewridge Drive, conveyed the most concerns regarding the proposed roof re-pitch and foreseeable view impacts of the distant views of the Bay. Per the City's Design Guidelines, the most important views would be from primary living areas of the home: living, dining, and kitchen. In reviewing the photo simulations, it appears that there will be some view impacts as seen from the living rooms of 872, 878, and 900 Viewridge properties. However, Staff has concluded these impacts would be the reasonable expectation for most traditionally designed single-story, pitched-roof style homes. Also, while there will be view impacts in other areas of these three homes and the backyards the Guidelines consider these areas (backyard and bedrooms) to be secondary living areas, rather than primary living areas.

### View Equity

The City does not have a view ordinance; however, the City's Design Guidelines suggest maintaining neighboring views to a similar level that is enjoyed by the proposed addition. Although this project impacts established Bay views from the primary living areas of the uphill neighbors, the views are partially, not fully blocked. The proposed addition is a single-story addition with the same roof pitch as the other homes along the block. Therefore, staff determined that this proposed addition does not create a greater view blockage than other homes on similar parcels along this block. The impacts are also much less than if the project included a second story addition or had a steeper and taller roof. As illustrated in the photo simulations, the existing views are also blocked by trees and other neighboring roof forms.

It should be noted this property can be developed as a two-story residence, with a maximum building plate height of 24 feet and overall building height of 32 feet, as permitted by the R1 zoning district and consistent with the General Plan. By maintaining a one-story home with plate heights similar to the existing residence, this project minimizes view blockage from neighboring houses. In addition, the Design Guidelines encourage architectural compatibility when designing improvements to single-family dwellings, "the shape of a house, its arrangement of doors and windows, its roof style, and its architectural style all make up the character of a house and contribute to the collective appearance of the neighborhood." This project is attempting to achieve a more compatible architectural character of the neighborhood by utilizing materials found on other homes and altering the style of the home from a simple mid-1950s design with a flat roof, to a more traditional home style with a 4:12 roof pitch, consistent with the homes along Viewridge Drive.

Staff finds that this project is in substantial conformance with the Single Family Dwelling Design Guidelines. Please refer to Attachment 1 Findings for Approval.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

On September 6, 2019, the Chief of Planning and project planner met with interested parties from the surrounding neighborhood to discuss the project, review the proposed changes, and to field related questions. The primary concerns voiced by the meeting attendees were regarding the stability of the backfilled soil at the rear yard, dust and debris controls, and truck staging near the site during construction.

The concerns related to soil stability stem from unpermitted earthwork performed previously at the project site. In January 2016, the applicant had soil transported to the project site to backfill the rear portion of the lot intended to serve as backyard area. The project's engineer had the soil compacted to 95 percent relative compaction, which is industry standard to ensure newly placed topsoil stays intact and stabilized. In December 2017, a soils report of the project site prepared by Smith-Emery San Francisco concluded the existing conditions (i.e. post compaction) met relative compaction thresholds, confirmed there were no issues with slope stability, and that the drainage pattern was unchanged.

Planning staff consulted with both the Building and Public Works Engineering Departments to discuss the stated concerns regarding dust and debris controls, as well as truck staging near the site. Based on those discussions it was determined that each department's standard conditions of approval adequately address these concerns and that any related complaints after issuance of the building permit would be investigated by the City's Building Inspections Division.

Written public comments are included as Attachment 10. Please note all of the attached comments were submitted in advance of the June 26, 2018, Planning Commission hearing. No further public comments have been formally submitted to the Planning Department since the aforementioned public hearing.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:**

This project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines, pursuant to the following exemptions: Class 1 Section 15301 (I)(1) Demolition and removal of one single-family residence; and Class 3 Section 15303 (a) New construction of one single-family residence on a legal parcel.

**NOTICE PROVIDED**

In accordance with Government Code section 65090, notice of this hearing was published in the San Mateo Daily Journal newspaper at least ten days before this public hearing. In accordance with Government Code section 65091 and the City's Municipal Code noticing requirements, this hearing was noticed to the following parties ten days in advance of the Planning Commission meeting:

- Property owners, residential tenants and business tenants within 500 feet of the project site;
- The City's "900 List" which contains nearly 100 Homeowner Associations, Neighborhood Associations, local utilities, media, and other organizations interested in citywide planning projects;
- The City's Planning "Notify Me" email list; and,
- The interested parties list which includes interested individuals who contacted the City and requested to be added to the project notification list.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Att 1 – Findings for Approval

Att 2 – Conditions of Approval

Att 3 – Project Summary Timeline

Att 4 – Location Map

Att 5 – Project Plans

Att 6 – Photo Simulations

Att 7 – Factual Data Sheet

Att 8 – Comparative Technical Data Table

Att 9 – Single-Family Dwelling Guidelines

Att 10 – Public Comments

**STAFF CONTACT**

Phillip Brennan, Associate Planner

[pbrennan@cityofsanmateo.org](mailto:pbrennan@cityofsanmateo.org)

(650) 522-7218