



**CITY OF SOUTH PASADENA  
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**

**REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 3, 2023 AT 6:30 P.M.**

**CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
1424 MISSION STREET, SOUTH PASADENA, CA 91030**

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**CALL TO ORDER:**

Chair Brian Nichols called the Regular Meeting of the South Pasadena Design Review Board to order on Thursday, August 3, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. The meeting was conducted as an in-person from the Council Chambers located at 1424 Mission Street, South Pasadena, California.

**ROLL CALL**

**PRESENT:**

Brian Nichols, Chair  
Samantha Hill, Board Member  
Kay Younger, Board Member

**ABSENT:**

Melissa Hon Tsai, Vice-Chair  
Joe Carlson, Board Member

**COUNCIL LIAISON:**

Janet Braun, Councilmember

**STAFF**

**PRESENT:**

Matt Chang, Planning Manager  
Sandra Robles, Associate Planner  
Lillian Estrada, Administrative Secretary

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Majority vote of the Board to proceed with Board business.

Chair Nichols asked if Board Members or Staff had any changes to the Agenda. There were no changes requested and the Agenda was approved as submitted.

**DISCLOSURE OF SITE VISITS AND EX-PARTE CONTACTS**

Disclosure by Board of site visits and ex-parte contact for items on the agenda.

None.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

**1. Public Comment – General (Non-Agenda Items)**

None.

**PUBLIC HEARING**

- 2. 2031 Crestlake Avenue (APN: 5319-015-025), Project No. 2506-DRX:** A request for a Design Review Permit (DRX) to add a 134 square-foot, first-floor addition and a 914 square-foot, second story addition to an existing 1,304 square-foot one-story single-family dwelling at 2031 Crestlake Avenue (APN: 5319-015-025). In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption under Section 15301, Class 1 (Existing Facilities).

**Recommendation:**

Find the project exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15301. Approve the project, subject to the recommended conditions of approval.

**Presentation:**

Associate Planner Robles presented the staff report. The applicant also had a presentation.

City Council Liaison, Janet Braun, asked if there was a time limit for an applicant's presentation.

Planning Manager Chang stated that there was no time limit for the applicant's presentation.

The owner's representative, Kaizen Chen, made a presentation.

Board Member Hill asked the applicant if the two trees in the front on the renderings were new or existing.

Mr. Chen stated the trees were existing and that there would be additional ones added as well.

Chair Nichols stated that the applicant mentioned that there were letters of concern from neighbors about the basement. He asked if the applicant had consulted with civil and structural engineers.

Mr. Chen responded that the civil engineer was at the property yesterday and there will be a soil report in a week. He added that the family had already hired the structural engineer and so once the soil report was out, the structural engineer will work closely with the soil engineer to come up with the best approach to grading the basement. He continued that they would work on this in the safest way possible either through a slot-cutting approach or through providing reinforcements beforehand working from inspections from the City.

Chair Nichols asked if the existing home had a framed first floor or was it a slab-on grade.

Mr. Chen stated it was a raised floor.

Chair Nichols then asked staff if there if there were any public comments. Ms. Estrada stated there were four public comments.

**Public Comments:**

Mr. Brian Lee stated he lived at 2035 Crestlake Avenue. He added that they need to dig a hole for the basement and that would be large. Mr. Lee asked the Board to create a win-win-win situation by eliminating the basement from the design. He continued that the first winner would be the neighbor who will not have to worry about the foundation. The second winner is the project since they will save money. The third winner is by not transporting 7,000 square feet of soil from one location to another with trucks creating a lot of carbon emission.

Ms. Grace Chang stated she lived at 1336 Elm Park Street. She stated she shares Mr. Lee's concerns. She stated that she remodeled one room, ten years ago and when she applied for a permit, the planner emphasized compatibility with the surrounding houses in the community. She stated that when she reviewed the plans for this project at 2031 Crestlake Avenue, she did not feel that it was compatible with the neighborhood. Ms. Chang stated that she does not support the design of the project and that it needs to be revised.

Mr. Ray Santana of stated he has been a resident of South Pasadena for 37 years and is an attorney and retired judge and the reason he is speaking is that he believes this project has many problems. Mr. Santana stated that he does not understand why they are building a basement. He added that this house was a McMansion and that could be used for other purposes. He said that the basement is going to take a long time and it will disrupt the traffic, hurt the climate, and change the look of the neighborhood. He stated the first condition, and the only way he would accept the project, would be an elimination of the basement.

Ms. Carolyn Ha from 2022 Crestlake Avenue stated that she is a 20-year resident and lives across the street from this project. She added that the design of this project is very different from the other homes on the street. She added that she is worried, since this is like a mansion, the street will start getting crowded and it will be very inconvenient to find parking. Ms. Ha also stated she is against the

basement and that no one on the street has a basement. Ms. Ha added that they could not compare this project to 2034 Crestlake Avenue because that property is on an incline.

Ms. Lingqi Tang stated that she lived next door to the proposed project and had submitted written comments to the Board. She said she was surprised seeing that the applicant referenced her house as a comparable house since her home was a one-floor ranch home of 1,288 square feet. Ms. Tang stated that no other home in her neighborhood has a balcony or a basement and that she worried about her foundation if her neighbor were to dig 270 cubic yards of foundation. She added that this will have an impact on her house and that she will need some liability to her house regarding her foundation. Finally, she stated that they are proposing a north-facing windows which look into her property and that the second story will block her sunlight. She asked the Board to consider her concerns when reviewing the project.

Ms. Helena Lee stated that she lives at 2035 Crestlake Avenue and submitted written comment as well. She stated that the Board could not use the 2034 Crestlake home in its comparison since it was built into a hill. Ms. Lee stated she was not allowed to build in the back when she added a second story to her own home in 1987. She stated that the proposed project is a farmhouse and there are no farmhouses on the block. In addition, she added, no one in the neighborhood has a big front porch, big back patio, a balcony or a basement. Finally, she stated that when it rains it would be a big problem for the basement.

Ms. Estrada asked if there were any public comments on Zoom and there were none.

Chair Nichols asked the applicant if they had a rebuttal for all of the comments.

Homeowner Denise apologized to her neighbors for not speaking to them in advance and she said she was willing to compromise. She stated that the concerns are valid and she wants to make sure everyone is happy. She said the reason that they want to make the house bigger is that they are a family of seven.

Mr. Chen also stated that space is essential. However, he added, the owner is open hearted to accept conditions of approval. He added that he hoped everyone could understand that they are a family of seven and need space.

With no further requests to speak, the public comments portion of the hearing was closed.

**Board Member Discussion:**

Board Member Hill said she heard others refer to the aesthetic as contemporary or modern farmhouse but she would argue it is adjacent to that and that with minor tweaks it would blend better. She stated that just removing the window muntins would make it blend more with the style of the neighborhood. She added that the

massing is almost identical to the neighbor's house. She stated she heard it referred to as a McMansion and a McMansion is where you are building out to the full envelope of the lot and that is not the case for this project. She added that she felt the design of this house was a major improvement and the designer did a beautiful job. As for the basement, Board Member Hill stated she had a basement, albeit smaller, and lived in South Pasadena. She asked staff if it was in fact true that there were no other basements in that neighborhood or if other excavations had occurred. She also said that she believes in professional credentials so when you have soil engineers, civil engineers and structural engineers, designing, testing and surveying the site, she believes that they consider safety and make necessary adjustments.

Board Member Younger said she understands why some of the neighbors are upset. However, she added, it is a very beautiful design and everyone is free to upgrade his or her property. She stated that what they did with the second-story by making it smaller, it will impede less on the sunlight for the neighbor's south-side window. She said that Mr. Lee's comment about the rain was worth noting but that overall, she felt it was a beautiful design and they would all get along with each other as neighbors in the end. She said that is all she felt and that she agreed with Board Member Hill's comments.

Chair Nichols stated that the first story was the envelope of what was the existing house and the second story does step it back. In addition, he added that the windows on the second story of the north side of the house are very small in what appears to be an attempt to ensure the neighbor's privacy. Chair Nichols did suggest that the backyard elevation, the back patio, and the second story porch are large for the size of the backyard. He added that he saw a number of sconces and lights on the second story that could create glare for the neighbors and that the homeowners might want to be conscious of that when they pick out their light sources. As for scale, Chair Nichols stated that he felt the project was similar in scale to the house next door and that dialing back the details of the windows, as Board Member Hill mentioned, could help make the house more in line with ranch style. Chair Nichols commented that though the Design Review Board does not normally comment on the basement since it is out of sight, it is part of the process of the city plan check. However, he added, if someone engages structural and civil engineers, they are professionals and they are putting their professional work on the line to verify and engineer the basement, walls and waterproofing to make sure there aren't any issues.

Board Member Hill stated that Chair Nichols made a great point related to the lighting. She said that changing the light fixtures, the muntins, the patterning, and maybe adding shiplap could bring the home more into the ranch look. She said she noticed the neighbor to the east had the shiplap style siding. She added that regarding the question of two-story comparable homes, she looked on Google Earth and felt that the house across the street is questionable because of the way it fits in the topography but that further down the street there are two other properties that are double stories and so the massing is not out of context. Board

Member Hill agreed with Chair Nichols that the back porch was a bit large and shrinking it a bit might help. She added that with minor tweaks, this well designed house be a great addition and improvement to the neighborhood. Finally, she concluded that it does not seem like an especially large house for a family of seven and fits within the requirements of the zoning code.

**Action and Motion:**

MOTIONED BY BOARD MEMBER HILL AND SECONDED BY BOARD MEMBER YOUNGER, CARRIED 3-0, to approve the project with conditions of approval and a Chair Review to make some minor changes to the window muntins, the light fixtures and back porch.

3. **830 Rollin Street (APN: 5314-016-015), Project No. 2564-DRX:** A request for a Design Review Permit (DRX) to add a 95 square-foot first-floor addition, and to enclose a 133 square-foot second-story balcony, at the front of an existing two-story single-family dwelling at 830 Rollin Street (APN: 5314-016-015). In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption under Section 15301, Class 1 (Existing Facilities).

**Recommendation:**

Find the project exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15301. Approve the project, subject to the recommended conditions of approval.

**Presentation:**

Planning Manager Chang presented the staff report for Assistant Planner Mackenzie Goldberg who was unable to attend. The project architect Steve Dahl, also had a presentation.

Mr. Dahl asked if, for certain conditions from the Building, Public Works, and Fire Departments, language could be added, "if applicable," since some of the conditions would not apply.

Planning Manager Chang informed the Board that it would be fine to add "if applicable" to the conditions.

**Public Comments:**

With no requests to speak, the public comment portion of the hearing was closed.

**Board Member Discussion:**

Board Member Hill stated the project had a straightforward design that looks great, it is an improvement, she appreciated the dormers, she appreciated the articulation of the roof, and it looks like it fits in with the context of the neighborhood. She summarized by saying it was good project.

Board Member Younger stated it was a beautiful upgrade to the neighborhood.

Chair Nichols stated that he agreed that it is night and day from the 1983 version of the house.

Board Member Hill added that she liked the Craftsman style details and that the project was getting a great facelift.

**Action and Motion:**

MOTIONED BY BOARD MEMBER HILL AND SECONDED BY BOARD MEMBER YOUNGER, CARRIED 3-0, to approve the project with changes to the conditions of approval by adding the language “if applicable” to items B7, PW15, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8.

**ADMINISTRATION**

**4. Comments from City Council Liaison**

City Council Liaison Janet Braun said she had no comments but she wanted to thank the Board for their thoughtful analysis.

**5. Comments from Board Members**

Board Member Hill stated that she has noticed that the Board has gotten a lot more comments related to the construction process and items outside of the Design Review Board’s purview. She stated that she does not have an issue with it but was wondering if there was a way to educate the public or let them know how to address their issues.

Chair Nichols said he always feels bad when it is not in their purview to address some of those items.

Board Member Younger agreed with both Board Member Hill and Chair Nichols.

Board Member Hill said she did not have a solution of how to address giving residents an avenue or process to address their concerns.

**6. Comments from Subcommittees**

None.

**7. Comments from Staff**

Planning Manager Chang thanked Board Member Hill for her observations and agreed that members of the public had recently come in and had issues that were not related to the Design Review Board’s purview. Planning Manager Chang stated that he thought it might be good that in the staff report staff could go a little deeper and explain the process for the public. He said he was open to other ideas if anyone had them to help educate the public.

Planning Manager Chang stated that staff was going to update the General Plan and the Downtown Specific Plan and so for this month, there will be two Planning Commission Meetings: one on August 8 and one on August 21. Both meetings

will be exclusively for General Plan Updates, Downtown Specific Plan Update and all the rezoning efforts needed to implement Housing Element programs. He added that staff was planning to bring these items to a City Council Meeting in September. He encouraged the Board to attend and provide any feedback they may have.

**ADJOURNMENT**

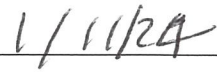
- 8. Adjourn to the regular Design Review Board meeting scheduled for September 7, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.**

There being no further matters, Chair Nichols adjourned the Design Review Board meeting at 7:53 PM.

APPROVED,



Brian Nichols, Chair – Design Review Board



Date