

From: [Birgitta Bower](#)
To: [Luis Topete](#); katie@fatpenstudios.com; [Kristin Bradley](#)
Cc: [MCC](#); [Planning Commission](#)
Subject: Development Portola/Alameda 2
Date: Monday, August 5, 2024 1:19:49 PM
Attachments: [Development PortolaAlameda 2.pdf](#)

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CONCERNING: PLN2024-00141

Dear Design Review Committee,

The proposed plan does not only concern **167 Portola Avenue**, but also the immediate neighbors: **157 Portola** and **580 The Alameda**. All 3 plan to add 2nd stories according to the proposed project.

580 The Alameda was built in 2023 after going through Design Reviews in 2020. They changed the original design from a 2 story to a single story. Katie Kostiuk was then the architect on the Design Review Committee, now she is the architect for this project. The other committee members have changed, and we think it is important that they know why the neighborhood at the time opposed a second story at **580 The Alameda**, as the bulk of it would change the neighborhood. Lisa Ketcham is still a Planning Board Commissioner and we are sure she remembers it. It is important to see a project in context.

Because of the exceptional scope of this project we have these comments in the attached pdf:

Page 2 is a map for clarity for people who don't know the neighborhood

Pages 3-5 comment on the 3 houses mentioned in the project and how it would impact the neighborhood if all three would have 2 stories.

Pages 6-8 comment on PLN2024-00141

Pages 9-13 comment on how this project is a good example of how the absence of story poles makes it impossible to gauge the impact of a project, and obstructs the original purpose of a design review.

Thank you for reading and hearing our concerns,
Birgitta and Ben Bower, 545 The Alameda, 10-year residents.

Development of 3 properties on the southwest corner of the Portola/ The Alameda intersection

167 Av Portola : PLN2024-00141
157 Avenue Portola
580 The Alameda

Comments prepared by Birgitta and Ben Bower, 545 The Alameda, El Granada for the Design Review Committee meeting on August 8, 2024 reviewing the plans for PLN2024-00141

● Built within the last 5 years



A proposal for 3 houses adding 2nd stories and changing a neighborhood

This project is worrisome since what is proposed is not just an expansion of a small 1948 cottage on a standard lot, but it also envisions the addition of second stories to the 2 neighboring houses built last year as single stories with variances because of substandard lots. Katie Kostiuik writes:

“Both residences on each side of this project have expressed their intent to add second stories to their single-story homes.”

“Attention has been paid to ensure our window placement and second floor balcony do not impact privacy of the homes located on 157 Avenue Portola and 580 The Alameda. The designs were reviewed by each Owner with the understanding that there are second story additions planned for both homes, and everyone has acted in good faith to collaborate about privacy and views.”

“The proposed Coastal Scandinavian design may seem large in contrast to the adjacent buildings, but in the overall context of the neighborhood and understanding the intent for two-story additions on both sides, we feel confident ...”

We don't know how far along the plans are for the neighboring houses. Our neighbor Jim Kochman chatted with Kristin Bradley who said they feel good about their project and have already had 'a good meeting' with the Design Review. That sounds like a violation of **the Brown Act**, so maybe the Thursday meeting is a mere formality?

167 Portola initially included the two properties that are next to it. The owner didn't get the price they wanted so it was split up into one standard size lot and two substandard lots on the sides.

The small lots were bought up by Robert Moules of Half Moon Bay, and architect Sean Freitas, Rocklin, CA. They drew the plans for what became **157 Portola** and **580 the Alameda**. Originally, they wanted a 23', and a 28' high, 2-story-houses on the substandard lots.

The initial plan for **580 The Alameda** caused a great deal of concern due to the 2-story size on a substandard corner lot at the top of an incline. The owner wanted 3' setbacks instead of 5' on the side and 3' instead of 10' for the side facing The Alameda. We, the neighbors on the opposite side of The Alameda (5 households), as well as the coastal community at large, voiced opposition for the bulkiness. The first design was not recommended by the Design Review, nor the second. The project was then scaled down to a single story which passed without objections from the community.

Construction on **157 Portola** and **580 The Alameda** was finished early 2023. **580 The Alameda** was apparently finally sold last month.

The **167 Portola** house would have been totally dwarfed by the original plans for two-story buildings on either side of it. The new owners of **167 Portola** now want to expand their cottage and add a second floor. They have a full-size lot and it's understandable that they want a bigger house and garage.

What is less understandable is that they appear to have entered into an understanding with their neighbors: they too will be entitled to second stories, even though their projects, with generous variances to make their lots buildable, were approved based on the single story design.

It is nice that nextdoor neighbors can negotiate with each other, but any building involves more than the immediate next door neighbors and here it seems that the community is getting a 3 for 1. **167 Portola** is using **580 The Alameda** and **157 Portola's** 2-story plans to justify what the architect herself calls "*large in contrast to adjacent buildings*"; they are piggy backing on **167 Portola** to get a second story that they couldn't do originally. Meanwhile the neighborhood is getting an oversized corner that isn't balanced by the other 3 corners.

Even with **167 Portola** rebuilt as a 2-story, it would not justify having **580 The Alameda** present a hulking mass fronting The Alameda. Those objections still remain.

PLN 2024-00141

Katie Kostiuik of Fat Pen Studios, Inc. is a talented, local architect and we think her design looks mostly good. She was also a member of The Design Review Committee 4 years ago when the **580 The Alameda** and **157 Portola** were discussed, so she is well aware of how upset the community was. For **167 Portola** she has made sure to check off the design standards so the project conforms to Design Guidelines of which she is an expert.

As noted, Daniel Burnham famously designed El Granda. He envisioned (though he never visited) the slope up the hill making a natural amphitheater with views of the ocean from every 25 feet wide lot with a vacation cottage for weekend San Franciscans arriving by the Ocean Shore Railroad. Portola Avenue is the center spike. Burnham most certainly didn't envision the RS3 designation allowing for 36 feet tall buildings, nor was he responsible for planting blue gum eucalyptus along the boulevards and all over Quarry Park. To use the 'towering Eucalyptus trees', as Kostiuik writes, as an excuse for whatever height of a new building seems a tad disingenuous, it was a very unfortunate choice of tree that the community now has to endure and live in fear of.

The design for the new **167 Portola** house is called “Coastal Scandinavian”.

I’m Swedish and when it comes to houses I think we are most famous for our “små röda stugor”, little red cottages. We have a great archipelago with little villages of old houses with gables and tangerine orange clay tiles.



The only thing in the proposed design that is reminiscent of the Swedish archipelago houses to me is the gable.



We wish that the current design of the roof could be lowered to lessen the impact for us on The Alameda and Palma who will have the view of the ocean replaced with grey roofs. The option of a slightly slanted roof like these newly built houses at the Alameda intersection would harmonize with the neighborhood and reduce bulkiness.



629 The Alameda, sits at kitty corner corner from the project in question



149 Portola, next to 157 Portola.

We feel that **167 Portola** is a full-size lot that can support a 2-story building. Due to the lack of story poles, we don't know what the impact of the current design will have on the massing of the neighborhood or the view for people on The Alameda and Palma. But it seems that the 14'8" second story ceiling height could be lowered 5 feet to reduce the effect it will have.

We live in an amphitheater, and it is neighborly not to wear too big of a hat, so to speak. (We had Monterey cypresses as a privacy wall in our backyard when we moved in. We removed them, planted smaller trees and that gave our uphill neighbors a new view that they appreciated).

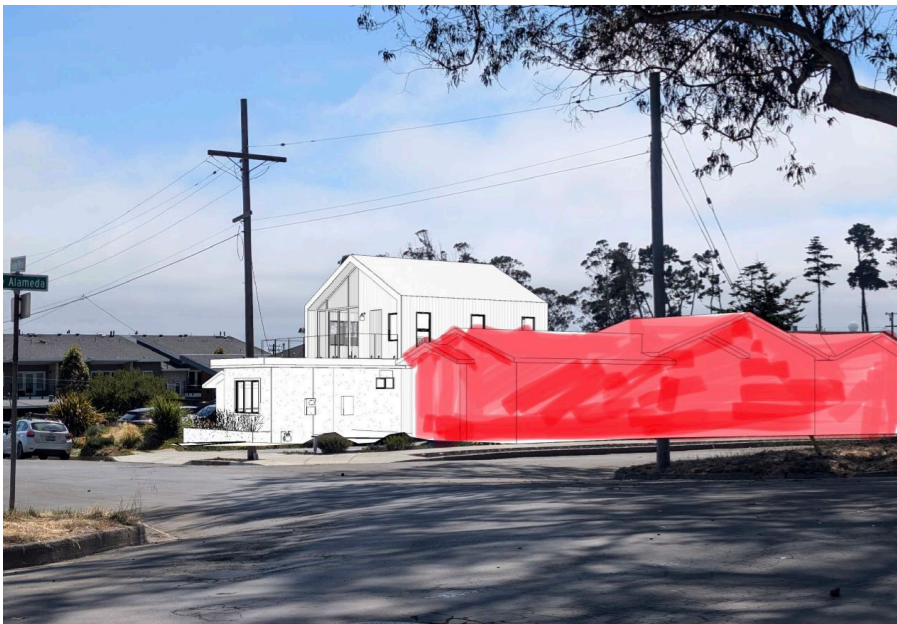
We understand that roof solar panels are now a requirement so it would be helpful if they were included and shown in the plan too. The neighbor at **149 Portola** had their panels lie flat on the roof to make as little impact as possible for the neighbors above them.

We feel that **157 Portola** and **580 The Alameda** are narrow, substandard lots that required variances in order to be built, so they should not be allowed additional second stories.

No Storypoles is a disservice to the community and not in line with the idea of what a Design Review Committee was supposed to protect.

It is extremely regrettable if the DRC and the County have given up on the story poles.

I know that in 2020 the DRC was for them and recognized that story poles are invaluable for the community to recognize the true impact of a proposed project. The current project is a good case in point. This photo is the only view we get. A physical representation with story poles makes it plain for everyone in the neighborhood to appreciate the proposed **28 feet height of the building.**



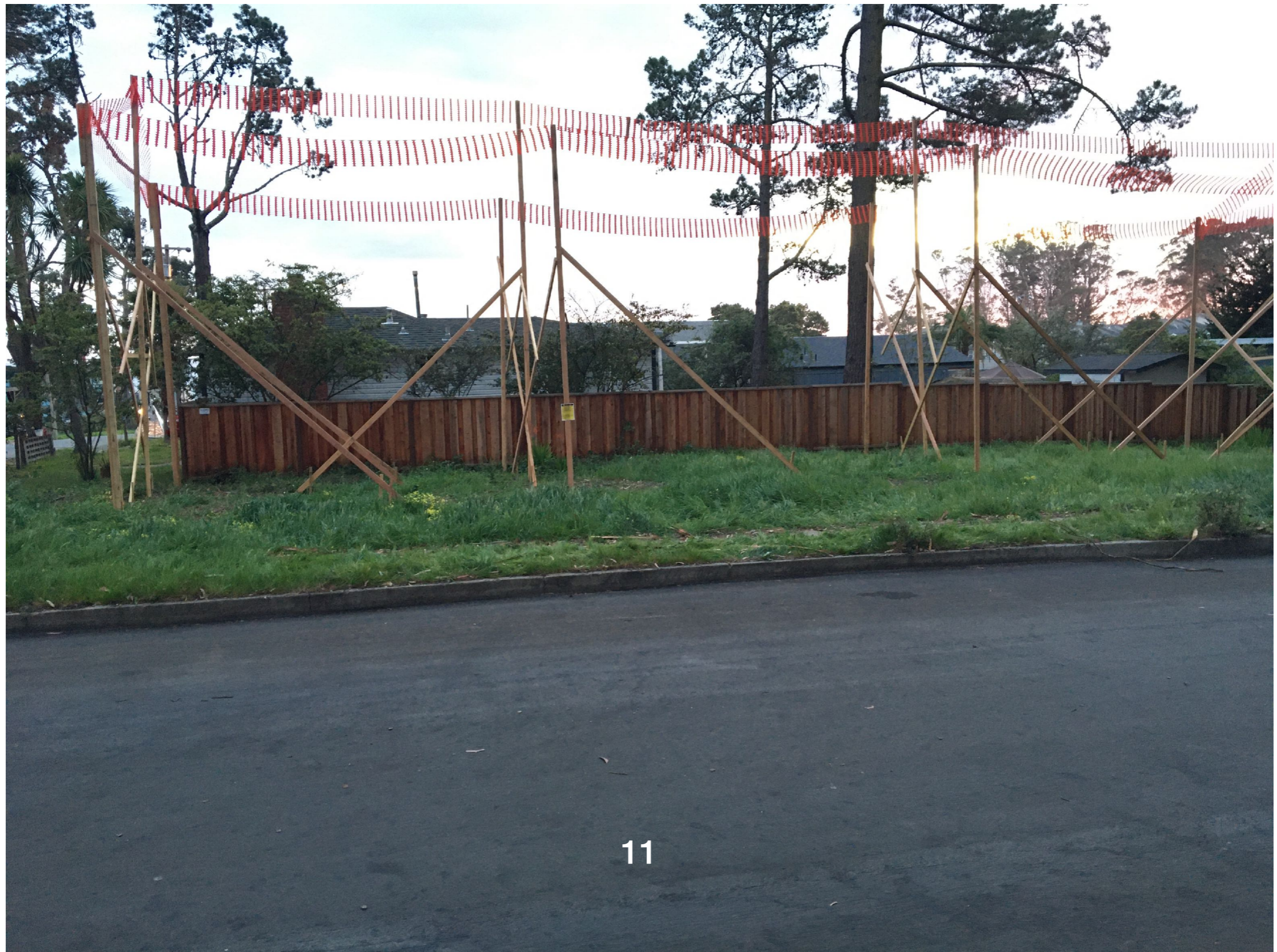
Story poles gives a 360° appreciation. If you live on the Alameda or Palma or further up you don't know what the impact is without story poles.

See the following slides of story poles for 580 The Alameda (colored in red here with current height of **16** feet). It was originally designed as a **23 foot** building. You can see what that would have looked like on the following pages.



This is what the owner and architect of **580 The Alameda** originally proposed. It was protested by the neighbors as well as the community at large for its bulkiness and for not respecting setbacks. It was not recommended by the DRC, and neither was the next two story version. The third proposal was a single story and all neighbors were happy.

See the next slides for how the size was illustrated with the story poles. It's a far superior way to determine impact from all sides and angles. The lack of story poles for the current project makes it hard or impossible to understand where the roofline will end up from the perspective of people living on the other side of the Alameda and all around.







From: [Birgitta Bower](#)
To: [Luis Topete](#)
Cc: [Cissy \(Cecilia\) and Jimi Baloian](#)
Subject: PLN2024-0141
Date: Wednesday, August 7, 2024 2:56:49 PM

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(My neighbor Cissy Baloian asked me to forward this on her behalf)

CRDC: file #PLN2024-0141
Parcel 047-208-110
167 ave portola el granada

My home is next door to the north of the Bower's , 541 the Alameda. I pay taxes for a filtered ocean view. I have already lost my frontal ocean view to the Maverick's apt building because I didn't have Ben & Birgitta's to research it for me ; and now my ocean view to the south is in jeopardy.

Since the property at 167 Portola is on a standard lot, all I can do is pray & ask of the new owners that they be cognizant of their neighbors and design a flatter, lower roofline as the Bower's document suggests.

We also hope that the adjacent neighbors to 167 Portola do not want to add second stories as the properties at 157 Portola and at 580 The Alameda are on substandard lots. Also, the design for a second story on the 580 The Alameda property has already been rejected by the CDRC and it was only accepted as a 1 story structure.

So again, I ask the new neighbors to be considerate of the rest of us and design their roof with the least damage to our view as possible. Not only does this affect the ambience of our daily lives; but it diminishes our property values.

We all know how much new development has occurred in El Granada. What scares me is that that no one is looking out for how this affects the life style of the long term residents, or the natural beauty of the landscape which made El Granada the Jewel of the Coast!

Thank you,
Cecelia Baloian
541 the alameda
El granada

From: [Rebecca Katkin](#)
To: [Luis Topete](#)
Subject: 167 Avenue Portola letter of support
Date: Wednesday, August 7, 2024 5:19:33 PM

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Hello Mr. Topete,

I am an El Granda resident, architect, and former CDRC committee member, writing to express my support for the proposed residential addition at 167 Avenue Portola, being reviewed at the August CDRC hearing. The design is elegant, and bridges the historic and current development trends in our community well; it blends a modern aesthetic with traditional roof forms and scale. The total area is modest; the massing steps in significantly at the second floor; the facades are well articulated, both volumetrically and materially. The siting seems sensitive to the adjacent properties privacy and views.

This project will be a great addition to this central block of Portola Avenue, and I think the demonstration of scale overstates its impact on the skyline there. Understanding there are second story ADUs already in permitting for the adjacent property at 165 Portola, this proposed design should be right in line with their height.

I hope the committee approves the project at today's hearing.

my best regards to the committee members and staff,
Rebecca

--

Principal
KATKIN ARCHITECTURE
c. 415-706-0981

www.katkinarchitecture.com

From: [Birgitta Bower](#)
To: [Luis Topete](#); [MCC](#); [Planning Commission](#)
Subject: Russian Nesting Doll- Design Review
Date: Friday, August 9, 2024 1:53:25 PM
Attachments: [Russian Nesting Doll- Design Review.pdf](#)

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Concerning PLN2024-00141 and the lack of transparency and respect for the Community

This project turned out to be only one part of a complex of 3 houses adding second stories. Two ex Design Review Committee architects were privy to information on how this “*central block of Avenue Portola*” (as one of them writes) was going to be transformed, but apparently that was nothing they would share any details of with the community. The arrogance of this is very insulting.

The function of the Design Review Committee is to keep standards and to allow the community and those within a 300 foot radius to have a say. The community can't form proper opinions and decisions when information is withheld.

This isn't a small project. Story poles should be required even according to the very weak guidelines of the “Demonstration of Scale Policy”. The absence of story poles in this case makes clear that this policy needs to be reviewed asap and strengthened legally. How can there be a policy that says that the County and community prefer story poles, but do whatever you prefer?

How can the County allow PLN2024-00141 to be ready for a Design Review Committee when the project turns out to be a Russian doll, with projects within projects.

The August Design Review meeting yesterday was cancelled when we got there at 2 as stated. The next meeting is in a month. We would like story poles in place and information about the totality of the transformation of the three houses in question (167 Portola and neighbors: 157 Portola and 580 The Alameda).

Local architects Katie Kostiuik (Fat Pen Studios) and architect Rebecca Katlin (Katkin Architecture) were on the Design Review Committee (DRC) in 2020 when my neighbors and I opposed the construction of a 2-story building on a substandard corner lot. We had no objections when it was changed to a one-story (580 The Alameda, El Granada). Kostiuik and Katlin are no longer on the DRC.

Now Katie Kostiuik is the architect for the proposed second story and additions to 167 Portola Avenue, El Granada, PLN2024-00141. In her project she includes information that the neighboring houses (580 The Alameda and 157 Alameda, both substandard lots with houses built last year) “**have second story additions planned**”. There is no further explanation of what those plans look like, but we are told that with “**two-story additions on both sides**”, the proposed two story addition to 167 Portola will fit right in.

Architect Rebecca Katlin submitted a supporting email for the 167 Portola project to the DRC at 4.50 pm (cut-off is at 5 pm) the day before the DRC meeting. She had some additional information: “**Understanding there are second story ADUs [sic] already in permitting for the adjacent property at 165 [sic] Portola, this proposed design should be right in line with their height.**”

There is no 165 Portola, so supposedly 157 Portola is what is referred to. It is also news to us that you can build ADUs as a second story addition on top of an existing house.

Architect Kaitlin has been able to evaluate that the height of 167 Portola and 157 Portola are going to be “**right in line**”, but who else is going to be a judge of that without any information or story poles?

Architect Kaitlin has also been able to appreciate that the one ‘Demonstration of Scale’ provided by architect Kostiuik actually **“overstates the impact on the skyline here”**. Indeed, why are there no story poles? With story poles we would know the real “impact on the skyline”.

The story of story poles is very murky. They existed until May 2020. They vanished when the County discovered they legally couldn’t require story poles. The DRC members knew people wanted storypoles. The County said in 2020 it was a lengthy process to make it a requirement because the Board of Supervisors had to vote on it. The County tried for a bit to say that story poles are ‘standard’, but the Revised **‘Demonstration of Scale’ from July 11, 2024** gives up on even the pretense, it meekly says that **“the County and community prefers story poles as they demonstrate scale and height in a 3-dimensional manner in the subject location, where neighbors can experience the proposed mass from their respective properties”**. But the paragraph starts: **“An applicant may choose their preferred method..”**

It does state: ***For smaller scale projects , such as small homes on ground-floor additions, or less visible projects, alternative methods to demonstrate scale, as discussed in this policy may be used.*** The context suggest that when it is *not* a ‘smaller project’ you *should* use story poles, but for some reason the language is totally vague, and someone has to decide that something isn’t ‘smaller’ and they ought to/should consider/ pretty please have story poles. Really, there is no backbone to this policy! Some would call it ‘fake’.

According to the Design Review website (<https://www.smcgov.org/planning/coastside-design-review-committee>) “The CDRC chair person prepares regular reports describing current matters of CDRC matters”. But the last such update is from July of 2022, when the Story Pole question was left to it’s fate.

**County of San Mateo.
Coastside Design Review Committee.**

**Minutes
7/14/2022.**

DRO:	Glen Jia, Planner*	CDRC SP	Camille Leung
Architect:	Katie Kostiuk *	Architect alt	vacant
Architect:	Rebecca Katkin *		
Montara rep:	Beverly R Garrity *	Montara alt rep	Mark Stegmaier*
ElGranada rep	Doug Machado*	ElGranada alt rep	vacant,
Miramar rep	vacant	Miramar alt rep	Linda Montalto-Patterson*
MossBeach rep	vacant	Moss Beach rep	vacant
Princeton rep	John Steadman	Princeton alt rep	vacant

Attendees.. *

The Coastside Design Review Committee (CDRC) is appointed by the Board of Supervisors to ensure that new development is compatible with the physical setting of the site and the visual character and provide a platform for neighborhood residences to communicate their concerns for the communities of Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada, Miramar and Princeton.

OLD Business July 14 2022

DEMONSTRATION OF SCALE/STORY POLES

SMC long term Planning has shelved the outline for adopting a story pole ordinance as a requirement until further notice. 12may2022 C. Leung.

Continued follow up for new date of adoption request at each meeting.

Demonstration of scale will continue to follow the 5/8/2020 Doc referenced in link below.

<https://www.smcgov.org/planning/policies-demonstration-project-scale-major-minor-modifications-height-adjustments-during>

DESIGN STANDARDS, UPDATE

Planning Commission approved update of Residential Standards by CDRC starting 3/2022 lead by C. Leung*, 1hr time allowance vs 3 or less DR case’s per Hearing.

2hr 7/14/22

CDRC POSITIONS

Recruit and recommendations

Jamison Stegmaier Alt Architect

167 Portola is not a “*small*” project! It’s a second story being added that is going to “***be in line with***” a second story on 157 Portola and a second story on 580 The Alameda! It’s the transformation of “***this central block of Portola Avenue***”, as architect Katlin writes. We want story poles.

We are deeply disappointed in these two former DRC architects who thought this was a proper way to propose this project. We are upset at the deceptive way this project was presented casually mentioning that this actually concerns 3 properties, with one measly depiction of project scale, that even architect Kaitlin says doesn’t do the project justice.

We don’t understand how the County could put on the agenda for a Design Review a project that is predicated on the neighboring properties getting second story ADUs (whatever that even is!). Were the members of the DRC not to know either? Would they have asked for clarification? Would they just make decisions without context?

Luckily, when we and our neighbors got to the location for the Design Review yesterday at 2 pm. it was cancelled (due to the wrong number for zoom) and postponed till September 12.

We feel that the CDRC members as well as the community should have full information, not just insider architects. This has been handled very badly. We would like an explanation and we demand that story poles go up so that we can judge the full impact of this transformation to our neighborhood.

I'm m trying to gather more information. I just got this from the County today. I will follow up on this information next week.

ADU's are ministerial and do not require a hearing only a building permit. If there are ADU's with the building department you may be able to see them in person only. Please reach out to the building department for instructions buildingcounter@smcgov.org.

Kanoa Kelley
San Mateo County Planning & Building Department
455 County Center, 2nd Floor
Redwood City, CA 94063
Email: PlanningProjects@smcgov.org

Re: ADU plans for 157 Portola Avenue and 580 The Alameda?

I just found that 157 has is requesting an exception to our setback requirements. That one is with planning Jonathan Bruns can coordinate getting you some plans. I don't see an ADU on the other property.

Kanoa Kelley
San Mateo County Planning & Building Department
455 County Center, 2nd Floor
Redwood City, CA 94063
Email: PlanningProjects@smcgov.org

From: [Luis Topete](#)
To: [Birgitta Bower](#)
Subject: RE: Russian Nesting Doll- Design Review
Date: Wednesday, August 14, 2024 4:20:00 PM

Birgitta,

Thank you for your comments. A few points of clarity. Any decision that may be rendered on this project is specific only to the subject property, 167 Avenue Portola, El Granada, CA 94018 (APN: 047-208-110). Any proposal on a neighboring property would be required to comply with all applicable regulations and standards and go through that project's independent approval process specific to their project proposal. If public noticing is required for a neighboring property's project, then it will occur as required. The project identified as PLN2024-00141, and any action that may be taken on this request, would be specific only to the project proposal for 167 Avenue Portola. Please limit comments to the subject project as discussion of projects on other sites is not up for CDRC review or discussion at this time.

Regarding story poles, the current policy, dated July 11, 2024, does state that the County and community prefer the use of story poles as they would demonstrate scale and height in a 3-dimensional manner in the subject location, where neighbors can experience the proposed mass from their respective properties. The current design standards require a project to demonstrate that the proposed project meets the design standards set forth in the Zoning Regulations, including project scale, at the discretion of the CDRC. As there is no adopted ordinance that requires story poles as the method of demonstrating project scale, other visual methods may also be used as outlined in the policy.

Item #4 under the written comments section of all CDRC agendas respectfully requests the length of e-mailed comments to be commensurate with the three minutes customarily allowed for verbal comments, which is approximately 250-300 words. Based on the length of comments that have been provided, we recommend you reserve further comment until the hearing. Please remember to keep comments respectful and focus on the standards that the CDRC will be reviewing the project against.

Luis Topete

Planner III

From: Birgitta Bower <bowerbirgitta@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, August 9, 2024 1:53 PM
To: Luis Topete <ltopete@smcgov.org>; MCC <midcoastcommunitycouncil@gmail.com>;
Planning_Commission <Planning_Commission@smcgov.org>
Subject: Russian Nesting Doll- Design Review

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From: [Birgitta Bower](#)
To: [Planning Commission](#); [Planning CDRC](#); [Luis Topete](#); [Camille Leung](#); [SMC SupMueller](#); [Steve Monowitz](#)
Cc: [Lisa Ketcham](#)
Subject: Comments reaching the CDRC members and the Planning Commissioners???
Date: Wednesday, August 21, 2024 11:24:38 AM

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Dear members of CDRC, Planning Commission Commissioners and Planning Department representative Camille Leung and Luis Topete, Community Development Director Steve Monowitz and Supervisor Mueller

8/16/2020, 4 years ago, I wrote and got some answers through Camille Leung concerning the demise of the story poles. The answer was that to be reinstated as a standard, the proposal had to through a process and a vote at the Board of Supervisors.

Judging from the “Revised Demonstration of scale” from 7/11/2024 that didn’t happen. Instead, even though “the County and community prefer the use of story poles”, “An applicant may choose the preferred method”.

On the CDRC website it is stated:

“The CDRC Chairperson prepares regular reports describing current matters of CDRC business.” But when you click on “regular reports” the last report was in 8/11/2022. At that meeting there is a proposal: “Attention to Applicant from Planner. It is highly commended that story poles be installed especially when the mass exceeds the typical mass of the average neighboring homes”. That’s where the CDRC involvement in story poles seems to end. Could the Chair of CDRC and the Planning Department explain why there still are no story pole requirements?

I am writing to ensure that the members of the Coastal Design Review Committee and the commissioners of the Planning Commission have been able to take part of my communications to them. It doesn’t concern just one project, it concerns the County policies for ADUs and how we are losing community input as originally intended when local design reviews and a local representative on the Planning Committee was instituted. If policies are changing, I think our Communities are deserving of a plain language information, reading standards for ADUs is extremely complicated for the average neighbor. At what point does a neighbor get a notice that the next door neighbor is about to construct a second story ADU?

8/5/24: Concerning a development of 3 houses, where 580 The Alameda had 3 design review meetings before the building of a one-story house was recommended. The new members should be aware of this history and context when reviewing the development of 3 neighboring houses constructing second stories, two which are ADUs on top of houses built last year.

8/9/2024: How the lack of story poles is a disservice to the Coastal communities.

8/16/25: How you game the system and build a one-story with setback exemptions, then use the footprint and put up an ADU, no local design review required.

Sincerely,

Birgitta Bower, 545 The Alameda, El Granada