



Public Comment Received for:
Item IV: Single Family Design Board
Process Improvements

PLN2024-00017

[illegible]

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City of Santa Barbara Proposed Changes to the Single-Family Design Board

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Comments

1. It is important to remember why this board was formed and as such has a different duty than the HLC and the ABR. Where generally those boards have specific responsibility to assure that the architectural style, size, bulk, scale on proposed projects contain attributes that preserve our city the SFDB has a different review responsibility. The SFDB looks at size, bulk, and scale. However, style is subject to the “compatibility” of the neighborhood in which it sits as defined in the city’s neighborhood preservation ordinance.
2. Although the other review boards generally do not take into account project applicants’ budget, I believe that the SFDB does have an obligation to consider that element of a project. The board’s expertise upon their assignment to review these projects should have some experience in single family design and construction. Two considerations:
 - a. For owners that demonstrate sufficient resources, generally based upon the size and scope of the project, which should allow reviews for findings that are less budget driven and at the board’s discretion on neighborhood compatibility.
 - b. For owners who do not necessarily demonstrate that they have resources to cover extensive design criteria board members should be ready to utilize their best judgment and common sense not to imposed design out comes which present financial challenges for the applicant.
3. The subject of “style” as it refers to the project’s architecture elements should be based upon the style proposed and its general acceptability to the style of the neighborhood. There are numerous “style” types available to homeowners and owners’ prerogatives should be given due consideration when defining neighborhood compatibility. Once the board has demonstrated the neighborhood compatibility elements then the style being proposed should be reviewed on the merits of that style. Efforts to provide comments that bring to consideration the budget and design talent that is offered. If board members feel required to make comments on style, then they should be confined to specific reference SFDB guideline call outs or in the context of known style recommendations that can be provided to the applicant.
4. The issue of the word “compatibility” I believe still needs some guidance and training for board members based upon related objective definitions.
5. I believe that due to the very detailed and personal nature of residential applications, at least three of the board members need to be licensed “design” architects that have residential design experience.
6. The following are detailed comments to Staff Report of March 7, 2024, pages 1-10.

- a. It is important for board members, the public, and the applicant to understand that the city has put into place this board to assure our neighborhoods are cohesive and provide consideration from both immediate neighbors and views from the city in general. Because of the nature of our city's topographic many projects are not only seen from the street, but from several areas within the city.
- b. The use of the terms "size, bulk, and scale" have three separate and distinct definitions. The board chair and board members should be able to explain those definitions to applicants and the public when necessary.
- c. Because the State of California allows for any individual or owner to provide drawings and project information without an architectural license sometimes the owner needs to understand that the person(s) they retain to provide such information does make a difference. Many times, the SFDB struggles with complete information, misunderstood design intention and lack of visual clarity of what is being proposed.
- d. There should only be two reviews by SFDB, "concept" review which provides information by the applicant information to determine neighborhood compatibility, including desired "style." The second approval should be the criteria required under project design approval. Staff both at the planning level and the building department should be able to make that administrative determination. They will require pertinent and timely discussion between the staff of both departments.
- e. Staff should be able to make clear to the public and immediate neighbors that design review triggers are precipitated by city codes and that use of design objectives now being prepared for multifamily structures as not yet been adopted for the preview of the SFDB.
- f. The use of the 10 closets homes is a place to start for neighborhood compatibility definitions, but as previously stated due to the circumstances of our typography and terrain that may not always be possible or as shared by the members of the community. It is important that in substantive motions by the SFDB that their understanding of the neighborhood be codified in the record.
- g. In reference to the staff report identifying 35 triggers for SFDB review, the last I looked there were over 40 planning and building handouts that might have to be reviewed by an applicant before they proceed or even start a project. The number of handouts and guidance by staff needs to be further reviewed.
- h. Because many of the projects reviewed by the SFDB are subject to the hillside design district the overlay of most of the residential zones with the city at 30 feet make no sense. That is a one-dimensional guide to multi-level challenges. That is why some projects may appear to be four stories vs. two stories. I believe the entire building height zoning 30-foot requirement should be revisited.
- i. Use of the term's "aesthetic" and "style" should be considered for workshops for board members so that those applications when describing their consideration of projects are carefully utilized and explained in the decision making.
- j. Under "Proposed Preservation Findings" all board members in making substantive approval motions need to define why and how they are using the proposed language suggested in this section, specific to each project.

- k. SFDB should not be making “Grading Findings.” That takes specific expertise and is subject to state site drainage laws. This is a subject that should be under the purview of the building department.
- l. FAR’s are a significant tool for most projects under an acre. Projects being proposed for over an acre, particularly on up-built sites, do not really make sense unless an acre building footprint is being proposed. Generally, a home of 4,000 GSF or 10,000GSF can be judged against how it sits on the land within an acre.
- m. If the Community Development Department is interested in the “customer experience” then they need to consider their availability to not only applicants but to the public. The pandemic protocols have now been declared over, the department needs to return to responsible opening hours, not just the twelve hours now open. All staff should be required to respond to either phone or email inquiries within 48 hours, either indicating a time and date they will respond to or actual engagement. Too many inquiries go unanswered for days or even weeks.