

## Public Comments regarding P2020-0056-ASPR and TTM at 4080 Lafayette Pl

Three (3) written comments in total, all via email from Jon Andersen-Miller (in chronological order):

### Comment 1 of 3, August 30, 2020:

I'm writing to comment on the review of the development at 4080 Lafayette Place that took place last Wednesday, Aug 26 2020. I am sorry to have missed the actual Zoom meeting, but was able to connect 3 days afterward to listen to the hearing.

I want to first state my support for the development in its programmatic form; increased housing units, fully subterranean parking, with some features of sustainability - something a growing city needs. And yet, the proposed result, the views that all the neighbors and abutters will share of this building as presented, is very wrong for the neighborhood. My disappointment was magnified when, in the discussion that followed, none of the Commissioners had any substantive remarks about how it relates to the context of the fabric of this neighborhood.

The elements of this neighborhood worth preserving are characterized by small scale early 20th century residential buildings, like the Craftsman being torn down. It importantly contributes to what you might call the "fabric" of the neighborhood. This comes in direct conflict with the real need to add density in an ever-growing city; so how might one balance those needs? Perhaps by looking at what elements contribute to enhancing the historic, residential fabric of the neighborhood.

Maintaining mature plantings in the parkways? Good. However, the commissioners might have asked about the viability of those trees after their roots are cut by the subterranean garage. If those trees are killed as a result of construction, will the developer be responsible for planting replacement mature trees on city property?

All of the development along Lafayette have front yards with generous building setbacks; does this development adhere to this setback precedent? If not, don't you think that will adversely effect the historic fabric of this district? Is that not important, especially at a street corner where you want visibility for traffic and pedestrians?

The materials that the architect has chosen to clad the building - brick and dark metal - are there ANY other residential buildings in this neighborhood that have these materials? How about in ANY of Culver City's residential neighborhoods? Do you think these materials help knit the fabric of this district together, or are they a jarring departure? Is that not an important consideration?

The best buildings in this neighborhood are characterized by Craftsman and Spanish Colonial vernacular buildings. They immediately read as "houses". Very intentionally, the taller, denser buildings (office, condos) on Lafayette from Culver Blvd \*soften\* the transition to the historic landmark houses of the block with their Spanish vernacular and

contextual finishes (stucco, red clay tile, etc). I would argue that the vernacular of the proposed building at 4080 is one that says “factory”, with it’s saw-tooth roof angles (not at all necessary to the building form) and the uncharacteristic finishes of brick and metal siding. The instances of brick buildings in Culver City are really only in the commercial and factory districts; so why would this expression be appropriate in this residential location?

The more you pock-mark the neighborhood with insensitive developments, the less strength it has as an “historic resource” for the community, and soon you get a cluster of historic houses surrounded by unsympathetic development. The “Historic Assessment” report evaluates whether the structure being torn down was of such great individual merit that it should warrant remaining; that is not the nature of 99% of Culver City’s housing stock from any era. What it does not assess is whether this new development detracts from the ambience of the historic neighborhood; and I would argue that in its present form, it does indeed have a negative impact. Why can’t this development respect the Craftsman or Spanish Colonial aspects of this neighborhood? It doesn’t have to mimic to be contextual, but it ought to have design integrity - which it’s saw-tooth facade does not. This is a design that could be built anywhere; what makes it specifically appropriate for THIS location? I would recommend the architect refashion their facade, at the very least, to balance with the historic attributes of the neighborhood fabric. I would also highly recommend the architect be required to show rendered views of the project, relative to its neighbors, both north and south on Lafayette, and how its massing at the intersection will be perceived. This should be a typical request from the Commission to any architect, but especially when reviewing adjacent to a historic district. That request is hardly irregular or unreasonable, and surely is part of the Commission’s responsibility for due diligence.

I am forwarding this to members of the City Council, as this project has already been presented with no objections.

Thank you for your time and attention,

Jon Andersen-Miller, ASID

City Council Member Response, September 1, 2020:

Hi Jon!

Thank you for sending in your comments on this project. Since I live so close by, I will not be able to vote on this (it would be considered a conflict of interest), however I was able to share your email with Planning staff so they are aware of your input.

Please note that when this item comes before my Council colleagues, they will be voting on a very limited scope, as the bulk of the project was already made final with the Planning Commission. I have copied our Planning Manager Michael Allen, in case you

had any questions for him. He can also ensure your comments are made part of the public record when this does come up for a Council vote, if you wish.

I hope you and your family are doing well!

Best regards,  
Meghan Sahli-Wells  
Culver City Council Member

Commenter Response, September 8, 2020:

Hi Meghan and Michael;

Michael - yes, I'd like to make sure my letter is read into the record. Also, can you direct me to where on the Culver City site I might find bios / resumes for the Planning Commissioners? I'm particularly interested in whether any of them have Preservation backgrounds - do you know? Being that this lot is sandwiched between two "Historic Districts", I was surprised that the context of these Districts wasn't considered particularly relevant to the hearing discussion.

Meghan - I understand that you may feel you have some conflict, because you happen to live on this street. However, you are far from being an abutter. Do you have a relationship with this developer or architect? Are you in any way affiliated with this project? Because I'd argue that you actually don't have any conflict of interest here. Do you similarly feel you couldn't comment or vote on items concerning Ballona Creek? Linwood Howe School? Downtown Culver City? The Duquesne strip? All within a block or two from your house. I'd argue that in such a small city as CC, where a "Historic District" can total ONE building (?), you can certainly comment on this, if not feel unencumbered to vote on it. You represent us all - those near the project, and those far. Please ask the advice of the council to confirm your assumption.

Best Regards -

Jon Andersen-Miller, Owner  
4068 Lafayette Place CC

City Council Member Response, September 8, 2020:

Hi Jon –

Thanks for your response.

Michael – will you make sure his comments are made part of the public record for this item, when it comes before Council?

To your questions:

Do you have a relationship with this developer or architect? Are you in any way affiliated with this project?

The answer is no. I have no direct relationship and am in no way affiliated. However, the conflict of interest law covers financial interests in properties within 500 ft. of the vote in question. I have copied our City Attorney so her staff can look into this – get the precise measurement from my house to the property, and advise me on this specific vote, as you have requested. But to reiterate, the Council vote will be *very* narrow. It will not concern the design, or the specific concerns you raised, but is instead is a technical question: “conformance to the City’s subdivision guidelines.” Whether or not I am able to vote, please know the Council will not be able to base the vote on the issues you have shared with us.

If you have further questions about the vote, the Planning Commission, etc. it’s best for staff to respond.

Best regards,  
*Meghan Sahli-Wells*  
Culver City Council Member

City Staff Response, September 8, 2020:

Good afternoon Mr. Andersen-Miller,

Thank you for providing the below expressed concerns of the proposed development at 4080 Lafayette Place. I will be sure that it is included as an attachment to the report that will go before City Council. At this time we do not have biography's on each of the Planning Commission Members. The Commission is comprised of five City Council appointed individuals of diverse backgrounds within the development community, which all bring unique and professional perspectives from their respective industries or areas of interest. You may inquire with the City Clerks Office for copies of any application materials submitted when each Commissioner applied for appointment to the Planning Commission. .

As Council Member Sahli-Wells explained below, the action being requested of the City Council is specific to the Tentative Tract Map (TTM). The TTM includes the subdivision of property for condominium purposes, and approval is not based on or related to the development program (size, design, volume, etc.) of the project. The development program was approved by a unanimous vote by the Planning Commission.

Among the Planning Commission's review and approval of the project design and conformance with the Zone and General Plan, the Commission discussed the appropriateness of the massing, mixed palette of materials, and relevance the project

had to existing nearby historic resources. Identified in the [Historic Resources Assessment](#), there are two properties registered as Historical Resources in close proximity to the project site. As provided in the technical report, the subject property is not eligible for any historical resource designation, and does not contribute to a potential historic district. Additionally, demolition of the existing onsite structures and construction of the proposed project does not result in a significant adverse impact to the existing nearby historical resources.

If you have any additional questions regarding the action that City Council will be taking, or the Planning Commission approval, please feel free to follow up with me directly.

Best,

Michael Allen  
Planning Manager  
City of Culver City, Current Planning Division

Comment 2 of 3, September 8, 2020 (via email):

Mr Allen, Planning Manager, and City Council Members;

Rather than accepting the low bar of doing no harm to the nearby Historic District with this project, how about taking it up a notch and aim for "enhancing" it? Does the Technical Report suggest ways to enhance the "resource" that is the District? Sadly, that's not the nature of Technical Reports; it really just reports on what you're set to demolish. Therefore, between that document and a Planning Commission uninterested in contextualism, there is a gap. Without a voice for enhancing and supporting the context of the "Historic Resource", Culver City will get sensitive infill only by the sole vision of the rare sophisticated developer - as the exception rather than the rule.

That is why the 8-year old Culver Villas condo project at Lafayette, 5 lots to the north, is an exceptionally positive example of good infill. It is larger in massing and height than the historic district it abuts, yet it's form is architecturally deferential to its neighbors. It's a development that proves that contextual continuity can be supportive of a historic resource. The developer was encouraged towards that end by the Planning Commission and neighbors, and the result was a positive one, for all parties. Is that not a lesson worth repeating - by simply requesting the developer change the cladding of his project to a material similar to the historic ones? Stucco rather than brick would go a long way to knitting together the fabric of the neighborhood.

I understand this is not what the Council is being asked to vote on. However, when a mistake is being made that will live beyond our days, is it not worth pursuing a mechanism for adjustment?

All the Best -

Jon Andersen-Miller, owner  
4068 Lafayette Place CC

Comment 3 of 3, September 9, 2020 (via email):

So here we are once again, "too late in the process" and only allowed to comment on a narrow set of elements on a project that will stand for the next 100 years. I'd argue that the time in the process for "Public Comment" on a project is always too late to relay an effective vision. When owners and residents are asked for comment, they're asked to react to something already conceived, and are in the position of being labelled "complainers" if they have criticism for a project; or, in the case of this project, their comments are simply read and ignored by the Commission. The planners and Commissioners have no personal stake in the outcome; if they were owners or abutters, they'd have to recuse themselves. Yet the owners and residents have to live by the decisions the planners and commissioner make. How can we fix this, and what can the City Council do?

The City Council could encourage the Planning Commission to expand the Design Guidelines created for the Gateway Neighborhood 8 years ago. That neighborhood stops at Duquesne, one street short of Lafayette; Lafayette and Irving actually weren't included in the Guidelines because they had Historic Districts within them, seen at the time more stringent and thus more protective of the neighborhood fabric, and thus unnecessary. The Guidelines outline the physical context of the built neighborhood and give developers and architects guidance to the subtle yet important aspects of design within a neighborhood that has special qualities we all want to maintain, yet isn't in itself composed of much architecture deemed singularly precious or historic.

Owners and residents ask that their neighborhood be respected and its best qualities enhanced. This should not put us in an adversarial position with the Planning Department or Commission. Design Guidelines were created so neighbors wouldn't have to storm City Hall with pitchforks every time a (much needed) development project didn't consider the consequences of its form and finish by people who have little investment in the long-term outcome.

Regards,

Jon Andersen-Miller, owner  
4068 Lafayette Place CC

End of Public Comments.