

Claremont Architectural Commission

League of Women Voters of the Claremont Area Observer Report

By Observer Rachel Forester

May 24, 2018

Purpose of the Commission

The Commission reviews plans for developments, building alterations, signs and landscaping. It ensures proposed projects conform to City codes and standards. Commissioners strive to increase the quality of life in the community by improving the visual aspects of the city. The Commission meets the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month at 7:00 pm.

Commission Members

July of 2017 saw the final month of Chair James Manifold's term on the commission. The vacancy was promptly filled by landscape architect Scott Horsley, with urban planner Waen Messner, artist and educator John Neiuber, landscape architect Robert Perry (Vice Chair), architect Mark Schoeman (Chair), architect Maureen Wheeler, and former CMC facilities director Brian Worley rounding out a full commission.

Professional Staff

Principal Planner Chris Veirs is the main staff liaison to the commission with Judy Chen-Ko serving as administrative assistant. A number of additional assistant planners prepare and give presentations to the commission. The staff work is diligent and thorough, and clearly a great deal of time and effort has been put into preparing for meetings and the presentations given.

Meeting Conduct and Attendance

In the two meetings I observed under Chair Manifold's leadership the commission operated with a clear sense of order and decorum that current Chair Schoeman is continuing. Meetings begin on time and are well attended by commissioners. Brown Act is followed. Commissioners arrive apparently having read the agenda and packet materials. Public attendance is typically few and generally limited to staff and applicants except for meetings on the Village South Specific Plan and the joint Planning Commission meeting on accessory dwelling units.

Notable Items

Accessory Dwelling Units

On February 20, 2018 the Architectural Commission met with the Planning Commission to amend the current municipal code on accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in accordance with state law. The state, in order to create additional housing stock (we are in a housing crisis), has asked localities to either adopt a set of state standards or create their own within a new set of mandated guidelines. Staff proposed a set of possible guidelines for the commissions to consider. It was my observation that while the concerns of the property owners and neighbors were being considered by the commissioners at length (over three hours) the needs and circumstances of the potential

future residents of these ADUs were being left out of the conversation. As we have a local position on affordable housing, I brought this matter to the president of the League and it was referred to the Social Policy Committee and then the Board. We determined to take a position urging the commissions and the City Council to consider an ordinance more flexible and permissive to the building of ADUs. The matter is still under review.

Village South Specific Plan (VSSP)

An area of Claremont to the south of the train tracks, along Indian Hill Blvd. stretching to Arrow Hwy is slated for development. With grant money from Metro, the city has contracted with Sargent Town Planners to develop a preliminary design package for the area. Last year the public was engaged in a meeting to gather input. A draft design package was put on the agenda for December 13, 2017 but removed as an item that evening due to ongoing negotiations with a prospective developer for a large portion of the site. The VSSP returned to the AC with updated goals, policies and preliminary design package, (found here <http://www3.ci.claremont.ca.us/weblink/2/doc/252757/Page1.aspx>) on March 28, 2018. There was a great deal of public comment. Many were concerned about building height, over-urbanization, lack of a parking structure, and more generally a feeling that this design was not in keeping with the determinations from previous public input. Six of the seven commissioners had input to add but were generally inclined to move forward feeling confident that concerns would continue to be dealt with as the process moves forward. Commissioner Wheeler shared many of the public's concerns and was not pleased with the preliminary design package, stating the plan was not specific enough. The City Council determined to send this back to the commissions for further review. A joint Planning / Architectural Commission meeting was scheduled for May 21, 2018.

Knights Inn Motel, 721 South Indian Hill Blvd

Last year this body approved a lack-luster but better-than-nothing demolition of the Knights Inn Motel to build a generic Hampton Inn. That design is no longer and on May 9, 2018, the commission saw a new preliminary design. Determining that the cost of a full demolition would be an additional \$100,000 per room, the developer has come back with a custom craftsman style design where-in the existing lobby and car-port are demolished but the rooms would be stripped down to their studs and foundations and built back up from there. This substantial remodel will leave a hotel with a character far more in line with Claremont's design esthetics. The Commissioners were pleased with this development. Having heard feedback from the Commission, the applicant continues to work on a final design to be re-submitted to the Commission later.

Projects

- 6/28/17 Mills Act* agreement request for the property located at 705 North Indian Hill Blvd, applicants Douglas and Christine Mann

- 6/28/17 Major remodel of existing office building at 150 W. 1st Street, applicant Claremont Lincoln University
- 7/26/17 Design review for a parking garage and residential townhome development at the Old School House / Double Tree Hotel center, applicant Claremont Condo Development LP
- 10/26/17 Review of Foothill Blvd Master plan, input on entry signs, bus shelters, seating nodes
- 11/29/17 Review of addition and site improvement at 435 Berkley Ave., applicant Our Lady of the Assumption
- 12/13/17 Sign review for a secondary free-standing sign at 555 Watson Dr., applicant Technip
- 1/24/18 Remodel of restaurant space in the Packing House, 532 W. First St., applicant Gus's BBQ
- 2/20/18 Joint meeting with the Planning Commission to revise the current Municipal Code addressing accessory dwelling units
- 2/28/18 Architectural review of proposed addition to existing single-story residence, and request for a minor exception permit located at 184 east Villanova Drive, applicant Victoria Tessier
- 3/28/18 Presentation of Village South Specific Plan draft goals and guiding principles, David Sargent of Sargent Town Planners presenting along with city staff
- 4/16/18 Preliminary review of the Gold Line bridge at the Indian Hill crossing and the Metro parking structure on First St.
- 4/25/18 Approval of sign program amendment and sign variance, applicant Claremont Hyundai
- 5/9/18 Site plan review for addition of second story dormer and balcony to historic village property at 1130 Harvard Ave., applicant Alan Brookman, Hartman/Baldwin Design Build
- 5/9/18 Preliminary review for major renovation to the Knights Inn Motel at 721 S. Indian Hill Blvd., applicant Roger Desai - Smart Investment, Inc.

*Mills Act contracts are an historic preservation tool used as an incentive for property owners to preserve or restore historic properties. Enacted by the State of California, Mills Act proved a method for calculating property value that can result in a value much lower than the current tax

basis and much lower than the current market value. Upon approval of a contract, property taxes (not including special assessments) are based on this lower value. In exchange for the lower assessed value, the property owner agrees to make significant improvements to the property and to preserve elements of the property (exterior and interior) that are determined to be of significance to the community. Source: Claremont Heritage website