

Agenda Report

TO: City Council **DATE:** November 8, 1999
FROM: City Manager
SUBJECT: Zone Change to Add a Hillside District Overlay to the RS-4 Zoning District North of New York Drive and West of Sierra Madre Villa.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council following a public hearing:

1. Find the proposed project to be Categorically Exempt (Class 8) from environmental review pursuant to the guidelines of the California Environmental Quality Act, CEQA Guidelines, Section 15308, Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment;
2. Find that the proposed Zone Change is consistent with the policies of the General Plan, and approve the Zone Change from RS-4 (Single-family Residential, 0-4 units/acre) to RS-4 HD (Single-family Residential, 0-4 units/acre – Hillside District Overlay) as shown in the attached map (Attachment 1);
3. Hold first reading on an Ordinance of the City of Pasadena amending the official zoning map of the City of Pasadena established by Section 17.08.040 of the Pasadena Municipal Code from RS-4 (Single-family Residential, 0-4 units/acre) to RS-4 HD (Single-family Residential, 0-4 units/acre – Hillside District Overlay) (Attachment 3).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this proposal is to apply a Hillside District Overlay to the existing RS-4 (Single-family Residential, 0-4 units/acre) zoning district located between Mesita Road, Calvert Road, New York Drive, Sierra Madre Villa, and undeveloped property between Mesita Road and Hartwood Point (Attachment 1). Application of the hillside district regulations to the area would require that a project go through a more detailed review to ensure development that is appropriate to the area's environmental capacity, and to address any potential limitations to development opportunities due to the site's hillside qualities, such as extreme slopes on a lot. The study area possesses the hillside characteristics that

warrant the application of development standards that protect an environmentally sensitive area.

A neighborhood meeting was held on August 24, 1999. The majority of residents in attendance raised no opposition to the project. On September 22, 1999, the Planning Commission recommended approval of the proposal with one abstention.

BACKGROUND

The City's efforts to regulate development on its hillsides began in 1978 when an Interim Study District (ISD) was established to prevent any potentially harmful development while development standards were formulated. The Hillside Development (HD) Overlay Zone was established in 1979 providing for grading and erosion controls along with variable residential densities in accordance with steep hillside slopes. In fact, the majority of properties surrounding the study area were designated as HD at that time. However, the study area was not included. City records are not clear as to why this area was omitted.

On June 23, 1999, Mr. Carl Siechert appeared before the Planning Commission on behalf of the Mesita Road Neighborhood Association and submitted a petition requesting a Zone Change to add the Hillside District overlay designation to the subject properties. On July 14, 1999 the Planning Commission initiated a zone change study to add the Hillside District overlay to the study area. On September 22, 1999, the Planning Commission approved staff's recommendation to approve the proposed Hillside District Overlay to the study area.

ANALYSIS

The study area consists of 18 lots located in an interface area between the San Gabriel Mountain foothills and urbanized Pasadena, which comprise a total area of 482,907 square feet (11.08 acres). Twelve of the lots are developed with single-family residences. The remaining six lots are undeveloped and comprise an area of 151,588 square feet (3.48 acres). Four of the undeveloped lots range in size from .20 to .47 acres. The remaining two lots are .92 and 1.76 acres.

Topography

The topography of the eastern boundary of the study area consists of natural drainage swales sloping westward. According to United States Geological Survey (USGS) maps, the study area has a change in elevation of approximately 100-120 feet from its eastern boundary to the floor of the canyon that traverses the study area. Although detailed, engineered topographic maps for the entire area are not available to derive a precise average slope, using the USGS topographic map, staff estimates an average slope of approximately 40-45% for the entire subject area. Essentially, this means that elevation (vertical distance) increases approximately 4.5 feet every 10 feet in horizontal distance. In Pasadena, and other cities such as Whittier, La Cañada Flintridge and Sierra Madre, an average slope of 15% is the threshold used to apply hillside standards to an area.

Geological Characteristics

On the State of California March 25, 1999 Official Seismic Hazards Map Mt. Wilson Quadrangle, the study area is shown to be in an area where there has been historic occurrence of liquefaction. Essentially, this means that because of substantial rain or flooding, the soil no longer is able to sustain its position and becomes displaced, which results in landslides. More careful, detailed review of a project due to its unique geological characteristics such as this is precisely what the objectives of the HD are intended to achieve.

Fire Hazards

According to the City's Parks and Natural Resources Department, the subject area is an extremely steep hillside with highly erodible soils and dense vegetation, which include mature native trees and rare plants. The study area is within a fire hazard area where the potential for brush fire increases as properties get closer to the foothills. Applying the HD standards to this area will assist in assuring that appropriate measures are required (i.e. weed & brush removal, planting of fire retardant material, etc.) to reduce fire hazards.

GENERAL PLAN

The parcels within the study area and the adjacent areas are designated LDR (Low Density Residential, 0-6 dwelling units/acre).

The proposal will not change the General Plan designation of the study area, and the residential density currently allowed by the General Plan will remain the same. The proposal will apply an overlay district to the study area's existing zoning designation to provide additional safeguards to future development in the hillside area.

ZONING

The zoning designation for the study area is RS-4 (Single-family Residential, 4 units/net acre). Surrounding zoning includes RS-1 HD (Single-family Residential, 1 unit/net acre – Hillside District Overlay) to the west, RS-4 HD (Single-family Residential, 4 units/net acre – Hillside District Overlay) and RS-2 HD (Single-family Residential, 2 units/net acre – Hillside District Overlay) to the east and northeast, respectively; and RS-2 immediately to the north.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

A neighborhood meeting was held August 24, 1999 at the Hastings Branch Library. The majority of the seventeen people in attendance were in support of the proposed HD overlay. Three property owners of undeveloped lots within the subject area were in opposition to the proposal.

The supporters of the proposal had questions on the effects of adding a HD overlay to the area, and why the overlay had not applied to this area as well. One of the property owners

opposed to the application of the hillside overlay expressed concern that the proposal would diminish her property value.

PLANNING COMMISSION

The Planning Commission reviewed the proposal at their hearing on September 22, 1999. Staff presented the conclusions of the research and evidence supporting the application of the overlay district. There were questions regarding the development rights of the property owners and whether development opportunities on the affected lots would be substantially limited as a result of applying the overlay district. Staff addressed this question by noting that the affected lots are adequate enough in size, as they currently exist, to allow residential development to occur at a reasonable density even with the Hillside Overlay in place. The Commission approved the proposal with one abstention.

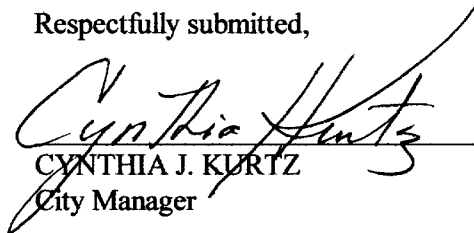
ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

This project has been determined to be Categorically Exempt (Class 8) from environmental review pursuant to the guidelines of the California Environmental Quality Act, CEQA Guidelines, Section 15308, Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment.

FISCAL IMPACT

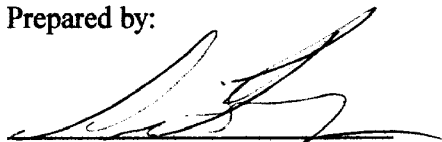
Applying the Hillside District Overlay to the study area may result in additional staff time necessary to more thoroughly review new residential projects in a hillside area. The development fees collected for new residential development projects in a hillside area are intended to cover the additional workload that results from such a project.

Respectfully submitted,

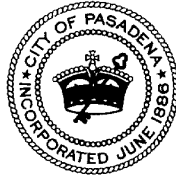


CYNTHIA J. KURTZ
City Manager

Prepared by:



Ariel Socarras
Assistant Planner



PLANNING AND PERMITTING DEPARTMENT

November 8, 1999

Members of the City Council
City of Pasadena
100 North Garfield Avenue, Room 247
Pasadena, CA 91109

RE: Planning Commission's Recommendation on Proposal to Add a Hillside District Overlay to the RS-4 Zoning District North of New York Drive and West of Sierra Madre Villa

Honorable Members of the City Council:

At a public hearing on September 22, 1999, the Planning Commission voted to approve staff's recommendation to add a Hillside District Overlay to the proposed study area.

One Commissioner felt uncomfortable with staff's recommendation because of the potential removal or limitation of development rights to the affected properties that could occur as a result of the Zone Change. Staff addressed this question by noting that the affected lots are adequate enough in size, as they currently exist, to allow residential development to occur at a reasonable density even with the Hillside Overlay in place. In addition, Chair Fay concluded that from a planning perspective the Zone Change is appropriate, and that the Commission's decision will not preclude the process related to these other concerns of development rights (i.e. existing proposals), which are taken care of administratively.

COMMISSION VOTE

On motion to recommend approval of staff's recommendation, Commission members voted as follows:

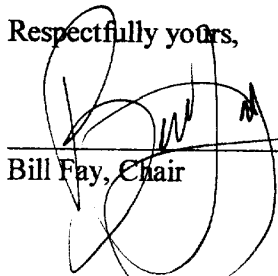
In favor of the motion: Fay, Janisch, Coppess, Estrada, Segal.

Abstentions: James

Opposed to the motion: None

Absent: Zepeda, Hadjian

Respectfully yours,



Bill Fay, Chair

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11/08/99
6.A.(8:00 P.M.)