

Published August 4th, 2010

Council Denies Home Proposed for 19 La Encinal

By Andrea A. Firth



19 La Encinal with story poles Photo Ohlen Alexander

At its July 20th meeting, the Orinda City Council voted unanimously to support the Planning Commission's decision to deny the request of the owners of 19 La Encinal to construct a new 3,700 square foot single-family home with a 2-car attached garage and elevator. The impact of the proposed home, which has an aggregate building height of 54 feet, on the neighborhood and the creek that traverses the property were the primary reasons for its decision. The Planning Commission had previously denied a larger home design, slightly over 4,300 square feet, in January.

La Encinal is a one lane, private road with homes on the south side perched 20 to 40 feet on the upslope that look across to homes on the north side set on the downslope that falls away from the street. #19, a vacant 1.48 acre, heavily vegetated lot, is very steeply sloped and has two tributaries on its site. The average lot size in the area is a little more than half as large as #19 at 0.85 acres, and the mostly flat-roofed two-story homes average approximately 2,300 square feet (adjusted floor area). To manage the steep hillside location, the proposed home design includes a 302 square foot bonus room above the garage with an elevator to connect the garage with the main level of the home.

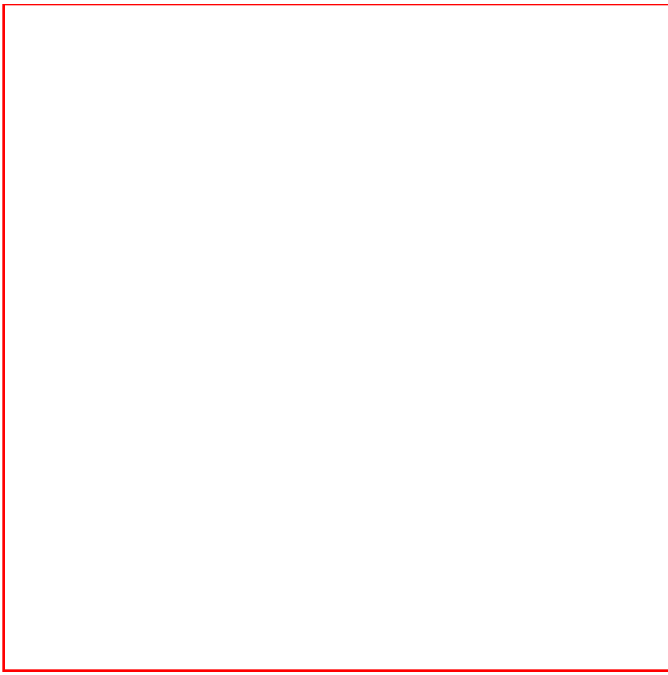
"The project as a whole meets all of Orinda's guidelines," said attorney David Bowie, who represented the applicant, Vincent Affinitio, at the appeal hearing. "There really is no alternative available," said Bowie, noting that the house was situated on the only feasible location due to the terrain of the lot. In response to the Planning Commission's concern regarding the design's plan to move the creek, Bowie stated, "We're improving the creek area, not making it worse...We are proposing significant mitigation to create riparian habitat that is not currently there," he said, adding that the lateral creek is actually a culvert.

The owners of the property have been communicating with the Planning Department about their plans since 2006. "We told the applicants several times that we had serious concerns with their design," stated Planning Director Emmanuel Ursu at the hearing. He

suggested that one alternative to address the creek encroachment would be to situate the garage on the opposite side and have a foot bridge that traversed the creek.

Several residents of the La Encinal neighborhood, who have been actively following the application process, were present at the Council meeting and voiced their opposition to the home design proposed. "The house doesn't fit the lot, the neighborhood, and the road...It's just too darn big. It towers over the road," said Sally Lubben. According to Tim Hyden, who resides at #10 La Encinal, there was a slide on lot #19 in 1986 that destroyed parts of his home that sits below. "[The proposed building] is literally on top of the creek," argued Hyden, who worries a slide could bring the new home down the hill directly onto his property. Jeff Supran, an architect and neighborhood resident, raised concerns over the potential environmental impacts to creek. "This is a sensitive site," said Supran, adding, "You cannot approve this without environmental review."

While the Council members acknowledged the complexities of building on the site, the close proximity of the home to the street, the building height and the mass of the garage and elevator, and the encroachment on the creek were all reasons they cited for denial of the applicant's appeal.



Reach the reporter at: andrea@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA