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Burton Valley Homeowners' Remodel Denied on a Split Decision

By Cathy Tyson

At a marathon City Council meeting, the controversial proposed remodel of a Burton Valley home was, after hours of heated testimony, ultimately denied - although the denial resolution was not officially adopted, on a 3- 2 vote, giving the homeowners, the Polichio family, a little wiggle room. At issue is a modest second story addition to a traditional 1950's rancher on Lucas Drive.

City staff has been supportive of the project all along, in a process that has taken approximately a year. The project has had its ups and downs: the Design Review Commission conditionally approved it, but the Planning Commission voted to deny citing neighborhood compatibility.

That theme was touched upon by Council Member Don Tatzin, "What is the definition of compatible?" Noting the addition required no variances and met all building guidelines, Architect Ken Hertel listed a host of design elements that this project has in common with the immediate neighborhood: porches, materials, garage, siding and windows, and suggested looking at Burton Valley in a larger context to define compatibility.

Homeowner Noelle Polichio, in an emotional plea to the Council, said, "This process has been expensive, exhausting and upsetting. We just can't do this anymore, we care about Burton Valley as much as anyone."

Several folks spoke up in support of the project; noting that, "it's not 1950 anymore" and criticized the "rancher timewarp;" another was concerned about ambiguous design standards. One neighborhood resident suggested looking at the "spirit of the design." Opponents also added their concerns, once again citing compatibility along with size and mass worries.

Tatzin talked about objective and subjective components of compatibility. The objective elements have clearly been met - the height, setbacks and more are well within what the city requires. The problem is the subjective component, a personal opinion that may mean different things to different people.

"We're considering all of our options," said homeowner Joe Polichio adding, "We're extremely disappointed." He feels they have compromised throughout the process, adjusting the architecture in response to legitimate concerns. "But we are so close, we just ask for the opportunity to respond to their suggestions, a chance to articulate their feedback architecturally." Just one more vote in favor would have approved the project.

Polichio feels they may be able to please everyone, if the Council can create a compromise, where everyone is a little flexible - perhaps in the future this controversy, and potential lawsuits, can be avoided.

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