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Published April 27th, 2011

Smaller Version of Burton Valley Remodel Approved

By Cathy Tyson

"We're happy to say that we are in substantial agreement," said David Bowie, an attorney representing Joe and Noelle Polichio in their request to add a second story addition to their Burton Valley home. "We have no objections with the staff report and conditions."

In a process spanning all levels of approval, from Design Review to the Planning Commission to the City Council, a compromise was ultimately reached that settled the matter once and for all. Initial hearings at the City Council were quite contentious, but ended with only positive comments and even a few moments of collective laughter - look for a new design element in Lafayette, the "Don Tatzin ridge," named after his suggestion of adjusting the roof line above the garage.

The Polichios originally requested approval from the Design Review Commission to expand the existing 2212 square foot home, 1612 of living space plus a 600 square foot garage, to accommodate three bedrooms and bathrooms on the second floor. Although that application was approved by Design Review, it was denied at the Planning Commission level after two neighbors appealed that decision. The plans have gone through a number of changes, but the final version has shrunk to a 718 square foot second story, less than half of the original 1,580 square feet requested.

At a recent City Council meeting, matriarch Joan Bruzzone, widow of Russ Bruzzone, said, "My husband and I built a number of homes in Burton Valley and he didn't go through near as much trouble as the Polichios."

After being encouraged by City staff to work with the neighbors, and holding a couple of negotiation sessions, they came to a compromise that the homeowners and the neighbors could live with. Attorney for the neighbors, Brian Mulry, said his clients wanted to keep the home as one story, but they searched for common ground and the Polichios were very receptive.

"We entered into the process in good faith," said the Polichios architect, Ken Hertel. "This is a unique lot with eight large mature dense trees." Those trees limit the ability to expand on the ground floor.

On a four-to-one vote, the City Council approved the application subject to conditions. Carol Federighi, who originally voted to deny the project, said, "I'm ready to support it; the applicant has come a long way. I can find it compatible with the neighborhood." The lone dissenter, Mayor Carl Anduri, still has concerns about the size and mass of the addition, "It comes down to finding if it's compatible in this unique neighborhood. My concern is that it's setting a precedent - it will change the character of the neighborhood."

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