



September 4, 2020

Felicia Williams, Chair and  
Members of the Planning Commission  
City of Pasadena  
175 North Garfield Avenue  
Pasadena, CA 91109

RE: Mansionization Phase 2: Zoning Code Amendment: Single  
Family Residential Development Standards (RS-1, RS-2, RS-4, RS-6)

The West Pasadena Residents' Association (WPRA) appreciates the opportunity to again comment on Phase 2 of the "mansionization" Zoning Code Amendment referenced above, given the significant deleterious impacts of this practice in our residential neighborhoods.

Although we concur with several of the proposals outlined in the staff report: architectural compatibility for materials and finishes, height limitations, fenestration, and some setbacks, we would like to make the following recommendations to further reinforce the ordinance:

- ♦ Neighborhood consistency regulations and guidelines should be clear and explicit. Often vague and indeterminate guidelines leave a great deal to interpretation that can result in misinterpretation at best, or in willful disregard—with uncertain and or lamentable consequences.
- ♦ The Commission asked to, "*Adopt neighborhood compatibility requirements and calculations, similar to those found in Section 17.29 (Hillside Overlay Districts), but administered through a ministerial plan check process.*" (p. 4 of staff report). A provision certainly to be emulated from the Hillside Ordinance is the requirement for story-poles and digital modeling. Often it is difficult to visualize the spatial relationships from two-dimensional drawings and schematics. The use of story-poles and digital modeling clarify intent and provide effective visual and spatial references.
- ♦ It is important that accessory structures and accessory dwelling units comply in style and scale with the principal structure. *Even if the accessory structure is not visible*

*from the public right-of-way*, an incompatible structure is often visible from neighboring yards and homes. An incompatible and/or oversized accessory structure impacts views, sunlight, vegetation, aesthetics, and value of adjacent properties. A glaring example of this is the oversized and incompatible accessory structure at the rear of the property at 315 Bellefontaine Street.

- ♦ For two-story homes and two-story additions, it would be helpful to institute shade-and-shadow studies to ensure that adjacent yards, pools, patios or even portions of the home are not adversely affected by new construction or remodels.
- ♦ Sometimes the allowable ratio of the house square footage to the lot square footage (FAR)—because of variable lot sizes—does not ensure consistency in massing and scale. New construction or remodels that overwhelm and dwarf surrounding homes, even when they are compliant under current standards, need be rethought and revised. A recent example of this may be seen at 300 Arroyo Blvd. The norm should be established by the median square footage of the existing neighborhood homes—as suggested by staff—and not the size of the lot.
- ♦ To our disappointment, to date ministerial plan check process has recurrently been ineffective and casual. Stringent and consistent review and confirmation of plans need to be in place prior to beginning construction. Once construction begins, systematic and knowledgeable oversight and inspections need to be conducted. There have been too many instances where deviations have been allowed or overlooked, and in some instances, remodels have turned into demolitions. Even designated or eligible historic homes have not been spared when oversight has been neglected or lax. To some extent, discretionary review could enhance this process and provide opportunity for public awareness and comment.
- ♦ Appropriate and meaningful penalties—both financial and operational—need to be in place to discourage the current trend of flaunting regulations to achieve owner, developer, and/or speculator objectives. The current negligible sanctions have not succeeded in serving as effective deterrents.
- ♦ “Draft Design Review Guidelines for Single Family Residences,” prepared in 2018 by John Kaliski Architects make a number of good recommendations and provide descriptive illustrations that could provide helpful references.

We would like to note that especially in the last decade, there has been an increase in oversized, architecturally strident, and incompatible houses and remodels introduced into coherent, established, even historic neighborhoods that are the hallmark of Pasadena. These intrusions are degrading the character and design unity of our beloved neighborhoods, as well as eroding privacy and visual integrity. Granted, multiple mandates from Sacramento overriding local planning decisions have made regulating

such adventurism more difficult; but we are confident that as a leader in civic planning, Pasadena has the will and tools to successfully stem this detrimental trend.

We appreciate the time and effort that has gone into this lengthy process, and submit the above recommendations and concerns for consideration and action.

Respectfully,



Dan Beal  
President



Mic Hansen  
Chair, Planning

cc: David Reyes, Director of Planning and Community Development  
Martin Potter, Planner  
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