

February 27, 2019
Planning Department
City of Santa Clara
Santa Clara, CA

Planning Commission

Variance: Request to increase building height to 22'-6"; a 12'-6" increase to the standard 14'.
Project Location: 450 Monroe Street
APN: 269-41-092

Dear Planning Staff & Commissioners:

We are seeking a zoning variance per 18.108

This application includes plans for a detached 1-1/2 story accessory building at 450 Monroe Street. The property is

- a 7,625 square foot lot located in the Historic Old Quad
- Zoned R1-6L (Single-family)
- 1-story residence built in 1895 listed on the city historic resource list

The accessory building meets the required minimum Rear Yard Area

- Minimum requirement: Lot width of 50 feet x 20 feet = 1000 sqft X 60% = 600 sqft
- Accessory plans:
 - North side of building uncovered is 5 feet x 50 feet = 250 sqft
 - East side of building uncovered is 3 feet x 20 feet = 60 sqft
 - West Variance = 23 feet x 20 feet = 460 sqft

Total Uncovered: 770 sqft

We are requesting a height variance for a 22'-6" tall 1-1/2 story carriage house-style accessory dwelling unit (ADU) with 1-car garage.

We are proposing to build a 1-1/2 story structure with a height variance (to 22'-6") because it is more typical of the historic accessory structures built throughout the Old Quad, is more compatible with the historic fabric of the surrounding historic resources and most importantly, complements our historic home. Building a limited 14 foot structure with a shallower roof pitch is constructing a building form that is more typical of ranch-style developments and is actually discouraged in the Old Quad design guidelines. The proposed design is a modern interpretation of a historic building form.

We understand that the Planning Commission must make the following four findings in order to grant the variance (Sec 18.108.040). Our justification for the variance is as follows:

(A) That there are unusual conditions applying to the land or building which do not apply generally in the same district:

(1) Unusual Building due to Historic Characteristic

The main residence at 450 Monroe Street is designed in the craftsman style and designated as a historic resource with the city. The 50'x149' lot is *unusually* narrow and long and is sub-standard in width in the

R-1 zoning district where 60' is the minimum standard. The *unusual* condition of this historical neighborhood requires building an accessory dwelling with sensitivity to the historical fabric of our property's surroundings. The eave heights of the proposed building are similar to many historic 1-story structures in the Old Quad and actually lower (subordinate) than those at our existing residence.

Many of the historic accessory structures and residences in the Old Quad have steep roof pitches and are often taller than what can be built today under the current Zoning Ordinance height limits and this is an "*Unusual Condition*" when compared to other ranch-style homes built in the same R-1 zoning district. This should bring into question whether the current zoning ordinance from 1969 was created with sensitivity to the older, now historic homes, built up to 100 years prior to its adoption. The ordinance is encouraging incompatible infill development, within the Old Quad, with lower building heights and shallower roof pitches than their historic "Victorian" neighbors. These shorter buildings with lower roof pitches are more typical of one-story ranch-style tract developments from the 1960's and beyond, but the historical home on this property has a much steeper roof pitch of 8:12. In fact, the height limitations in the Zoning Ordinance are sadly encouraging Ranch-style development within the Old Quad which is in direct conflict with the City of Santa Clara Architectural Committee Policies Community Guidelines:

(Section G, Page 1-G Old Quad / Agnew Village Single Family and Duplex Residential)

Architectural styles should incorporate the prominent orientations, forms, characteristics and details of these historical styles (referring to the Victorian and Mission Styles) in general and additions to existing structures or property developments should closely conform to the existing style. Ranch style architecture, modern plywood siding products, aluminum sliding doors and windows and other less compatible materials and designs should be avoided.

The key characteristic the Ranch-style homes is their single-story form with shallower roof pitches (often 4:12 or 5:12). Therefore, aside from the historic mission-style and mid-century modern architecture that use lower pitch roofs, these shallower roof pitches are more common to the ranch-style tract homes of the R1-6 zoning district than those individually built Victorian style homes throughout the Old Quad and this makes the land and building forms in the Old Quad an "*unusual condition*" that do not generally apply to the entire R-1 zoning district.

A Historic purist might say that ranch-style accessory buildings are an appropriate infill building form because they do not want newer structures built to match the older structures for fear that this would be "fooling history". The proposed accessory building does not propose to "fool history" but is a modern interpretation of a historic building form, using modern siding / windows / French doors / roofing to respect and compliment the historical spirit of the surrounding buildings.

Of the remaining historic and modern accessory structures in the Old Quad area there are many ranging in height up to 22 feet tall that is similar to what we are proposing.

Again, we are planning on this 1-1/2 story structure due to the narrow limitations of the lot and in order to preserve the backyard for reasons listed in the first paragraph of this response to A above.

(B) That the granting of the variance is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of substantial property rights of the petitioner:

(1) Preserving the Historical Integrity of the House

Constructing a new accessory building provides flexible space to support our growing family without needing to alter the historic resource (the main house) at this time. Our efforts are to retain the main house's original facade. After considering options to regain this living space in other areas of the main residence, we chose instead to build an accessory unit. Granting the variance preserves our enjoyment and property rights by allowing us to gain additional space and retain our green backyard.

(2) Improving and enhancing the Historical Integrity of the Property and its Environment

The property does not have a garage and requires our family to park in tandem in the north side driveway of the house and park additional vehicles on the street. The proposed accessory building would include a one car garage. This would reduce our street parking by half. Granting the variance preserves our enjoyment and property rights by allowing us easier and more parking usage on our property and reduced street parking benefitting the entire neighborhood.

(C) That the granting of such variance shall not, under the circumstances for the particular case, materially affect adversely the health, safety, peace, morals, comfort or general welfare of persons residing or working in the neighborhood of the applicant's property, and will not be materially detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to property or improvements in said neighborhood:

(1) Designed Sensitively to Neighbors

There are no indications that our proposed building harms the health, safety, peace, morals, comfort, or general welfare of the neighborhood. The structure is located at the rear of the property which already contains accessory buildings for the neighbors. The windows are placed such that they face the inside of the property (towards our house and driveway). Being located on the West side of the property and considering the surrounding properties have similar long, narrow lots with all houses at the front of those lots, it is set back far enough that it will not block the sun of any of our neighbors' houses. The accessory unit also has a low eave height similar to the neighboring 1-story structure at East property line

(2). Ample Off-Street Parking and improved front yard visibility

Building a 1-1/2 story accessory dwelling with a garage allows for additional off-street parking freeing up more space on our street and driveway allowing for better visibility of traffic and better aesthetics of the front yards down the street.

(D) That the granting of the variance is in keeping with the purpose and intent of this title:

Granting this variance does not allow the property owner to by-pass the developmental requirements for all future buildings proposed, it merely allows architecturally consistent architecture, befitting of the historic home on the property. Granting the variance helps alleviate the challenges of a narrow lot to create additional parking and improves local housing needs by providing additional living space while still maintaining the density requirements of the zoning district.

Regards,

Paul and Laura Esber,
Homeowners and Residents
450 Monroe Street