



**DATE:** March 15, 2016

**CATEGORY:** Public Hearing

**DEPT.:** Community Development

**TITLE:** **1958 Latham Street Project**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. Adopt a Resolution Conditionally Approving a Planned Unit Development Permit to Construct a Six-Unit Rowhouse Development Project and a Heritage Tree Removal Permit to Remove Five Heritage Trees at 1958 Latham Street, including a determination that the project is categorically exempt pursuant to Section 15332 (“Infill Development”) of the CEQA Guidelines, to be read in title only, further reading waived (Attachment 1 to the Council report).
2. Adopt a Resolution Conditionally Approving a Tentative Map to Create Six Condominium Lots for Rowhouses and One Common Lot on a 0.39-Acre Lot at 1958 Latham Street, to be read in title only, further reading waived (Attachment 2 to the Council report).

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Site Location and Characteristics**

The project site is located on the north side of Latham Street, between Escuela Avenue and South Rengstorff Avenue (see map on next page). The neighborhood contains mostly apartments and condominiums. The apartment building directly east of the site is two stories over a partially below-grade parking level. The apartment building directly north of the site is two stories at grade. A large grassy area west of the site is an amenity space for the apartment complex north of the site.

A small commercial strip center is on the corner of Escuela Avenue and Latham Street, a half block away. Castro Elementary School is around the corner on Escuela Avenue. Frequent bus service is a block away on El Camino Real. In addition, the City has programmed and funded a Latham Street/Church Street Bicycle Boulevard Study in the 2015-16 CIP, which would include the project’s frontage.

## 1958 Latham Street Area Map



Existing buildings at the site include a single-family home, a garage, and a 2,500 square foot warehouse, previously used by a tree maintenance company. The site has seven Heritage trees, including two healthy Coast live oaks providing substantial canopy for this site and the apartments to the north. More information about the site's trees is provided later in the report.

## ANALYSIS

### **Project Description**

The applicant, Barry Swenson Builder (BSB), is requesting approval to demolish the single-family home and warehouse, remove five of the Heritage trees, and construct six 3-story rowhouses. All units would be between 2,200 and 2,437 square feet. They all include two-car garages facing a one-way alley behind the buildings, street-facing porches and balconies, and landscaped front yards. In addition, the project includes a shared open area in the back of the site, underneath the two large Coast live oak trees.

## Project Design

### *Heritage Trees*

There are seven Heritage trees on the site. An aerial of the site showing the location of these trees is below (numbering is based on the Plans and the Findings Report; coloring is based on proposed preservation or removal).



The Heritage trees are spread around the site, such that it would be difficult to preserve all of them with new development. Two of these trees (Nos. 8 and 9) are Coast live oaks with significant size, canopy, health, and vigor (see photograph on next page). In addition, they are relatively young for their size (only about 50 years old), and have the potential to live for a significant time.

The Coast live oaks affect a significant portion of the site with their roots and limbs. Early in the review process, it was unclear whether any conforming development could occur on this site while preserving the trees. Ultimately, the applicant developed the proposed site layout, keeping the buildings and driveways far enough from the trees to preserve them. An arborist with extensive experience with Coast live oaks prepared a detailed report analyzing the limb structure of these trees. According to his analysis, the proposed site layout and rigorous tree protection measures would have a high likelihood of preserving these two trees (Attachment 3—Arborist Reports). This analysis was reviewed and confirmed by the City's staff arborist.



### Two Coast Live Oaks



The other five trees, however, cannot be preserved with the proposed layout. Preserving these trees would limit the buildable area to less than 20' depth, and would make it difficult to provide parking access behind a pedestrian-friendly facade. Based on these constraints, staff supports removal of the five other Heritage trees.

### Site Layout

The Project Plans are included as Attachment 4 and Attachment 5, and a site plan is shown below. The six rowhouses are arranged with front doors and large porches facing Latham Street in two buildings of three units each. All the garages are hidden, served by a narrow, private, one-way alley behind the units. This configuration is consistent with the intent of the Rowhouse Guidelines, which encourages “enhance[d] relationship between new rowhouse development and

public streets.” A similar project with hidden garages served by a one-way alley can be seen at 245-257 View Street.



Open space on the site is concentrated under the canopy of the two large Coast live oaks. While there will be limited landscaping under the trees, there will be ample space for a seating area or other recreation amenities. There is also a landscaped path between the buildings through which the large Coast live oaks will be visible. Each unit will have private front yards, between 150 and 300 square feet. In addition, each unit has large porches and balconies that contribute to their private outdoor space.

The project plans in Attachment 4 do not include the guest parking space in the northeast corner. Staff recommends approval of the project incorporating the guest parking space shown in Attachment 5 and in the image above. This condition is included in Attachment 1 (Resolution – Project).

### *Elevations*

All the buildings include porches, high-quality finishes and trim, variations in roof forms, and highly visible front doors. Units are differentiated through massing, roof forms, porch elements, and color. The buildings have projecting elements providing variation and visual interest on all highly visible facades, including the sides. The Latham Street elevation is below.



To facilitate the preservation of the Heritage trees, two of the units (Nos. 3 and 4) are “rotated” relative to the other four units. This presents several design challenges that were addressed by the project. First, the longer frontages affect the rhythm of the units; this was resolved with smaller-scale projections and by offsetting Unit 2’s and Unit 5’s porches. Second, a large portion of these units’ front facades contain staircases and the garage, which limit opportunities for windows. This was resolved with larger porches and ornamental design elements.

### *Green Building*

The project is targeting 104 GreenPoint Rated points, which is higher than the City requirement of 70. Green features of the project include low-water fixtures, low-water-use landscaping, and solar panels.

### *Tentative Map*

This project contains ownership (for sale) units and a Tentative Map must be approved to subdivide the existing lot (Attachment 6—Tentative Map). The subdivision is to create six condominiums; the project's land area, including under the buildings and the private yards, will be commonly owned by all six owners.

## **General Plan and Zoning**

### *General Plan*

The site's General Plan Designation is Medium High-Density Residential (up to 35 dwelling units per acre), allowing up to 13 dwelling units on this site.

The following General Plan policies are consistent with the project:

- **LUD 6.3: *Street Presence.*** *Encourage building facades and frontages that create a presence at the street and along interior pedestrian paseos and pathways.*

The facades along public streets are varied and interesting. One- and two-story porches and projections help create street-presence on these facades.

- **POS 12.1: *Heritage Trees.*** *Protect trees as an ecological and biological resource.*

The buildings have been designed and configured to preserve the two large Coast live oak trees.

### *Zoning*

The site is in the R3-1 (Multi-Family Residential) Zoning District, which allows multi-family housing, attached single-family housing (such as rowhouses), and other residential developments. The R3-1 Zoning District only allows six dwelling units on this site based on the lot size.

Rowhouse developments have their own development standards, which are compared to the project in Table 1. The project complies with the rowhouse development standards, except for the parking requirement (more detail provided below).

**Table 1: Rowhouse Development Standards**

Standard	Requirement	Proposed
Maximum Units	6	6
Floor Area Ratio	0.9	0.86
Front Setback	15' (not including porches)	15'
Side Setbacks	10' for 1st and 2nd floor 15' for 3rd floor	17'7" (left) and 18'6" (right) 1st, 2nd, and 3rd floor
Building Coverage	35%	28.7%
Height	45'	41'5"
Open Area	35% 100 sf per unit private 100 sf per unit common	42.1% 150 to 300 sf per unit private 275 sf per unit common
Minimum Parking	2-car garages + 2 additional	2-car garages + 1 additional

*Guest Parking*

Rowhouse projects are required to have 0.3 guest parking spaces per unit, which equals two guest parking spaces for this project. This project has one guest parking space necessitating an exception. Several features of the development may support this exception:

- According to the arborist, the project should limit the new parking and driveway surface under the trees' canopies as much as possible.
- Units 1, 4, 5, and 6 have space in front of their garage doors where guests of those units could parallel park. Normally, rowhouse developments do not allow parking in the area in front of the garage door since it would block through-access. In this case, through-access would not be blocked since the driveway is one-way and has extra width in these areas for cars to back-out from the garages.
- The project creates an additional parking space on Latham Street, since the previous warehouse had such a wide driveway. However, Latham Street is known to have a high street parking occupancy in this area.

If the City Council desires to require two guest parking spaces, there may be adequate space for an additional parking space underneath one of the Coast Live Oaks. However, this would increase the likelihood of damage to the tree.

### *Rowhouse Guidelines*

The project is consistent with the *Rowhouse Guidelines* adopted by the City, except direction for minimum lot size and driveway width, as described below.

The *Rowhouse Guidelines* recommend a minimum lot size of 0.5 acre, while this site is approximately 0.4 acre. The minimum lot size guideline helps staff screen inquiries for project sites that can comply with the intent of the *Rowhouse Guidelines*, such as adequate common open area and long frontage to support a relationship with the street. In this case, the project meets the intent of all the *Rowhouse Guidelines*. In addition, the rowhouse development type allows the flexibility in structure width to build around the Heritage Coast live oak trees.

The *Rowhouse Guidelines* recommend a minimum driveway width of 20', while this project's driveways are as narrow as 11'. The *Rowhouse Guidelines* assume driveways will be two-way, but the proposed driveway will be one-way. The narrower driveway will also increase the amount of open area and reduce impacts to the Heritage Coast live oak trees. The garages will have adequate back-out distances and driveway maneuvering room. Staff recommends waiving this guideline.

### **Previous Meetings**

#### *Development Review Committee (DRC)*

The project was reviewed by the DRC and received a recommendation of approval on January 6, 2016. Many of the key design elements previously discussed were recommended by the DRC, such as the following:

- Ensure all front doors face and are visible from the street.
- Emphasize the lower floors by removing third-story projections, lightening the second-story balcony roof treatments, and increasing the size of the porches.
- Increase landscaping between the building and the driveways and between the driveways and the property lines.
- Use roof-plane and wall-plane offsets to differentiate the units.



*Zoning Administrator/Subdivision Committee*

The project was reviewed by the Zoning Administrator and Subdivision Committee and received a recommendation of approval on February 10, 2016. No members of the public were in attendance. No public comment has been received on the project.

**Environmental Review**

The project is consistent with the density allowed in the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance on a site less than 5 acres, and it can be served by all utilities. It will not adversely affect traffic, air quality, water quality, or noise. The site has no value as a habitat. Based on these factors, the project complies with the Infill Development categorical exemption (Section 15332 of the CEQA Guidelines), and no further environmental review is necessary.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

The subject site has a total assessed value of approximately \$1.63 million. The City's share of the property tax is approximately \$2,600 per year. If the site were developed, the City would receive approximately \$10,560 per year, based on an estimated \$1.1 million per unit sales price.

The project is subject to the City's Below-Market-Rate (BMR) Ordinance. The estimated BMR payment to the City is \$198,000.

The estimated Park Land Dedication In-Lieu Fee will be approximately \$120,000 (or \$20,000 per unit) in accordance with Chapter 41 of the City Code, to be paid prior to the issuance of building permits. Because the project is less than 50 units, park land dedication cannot be required.

**CONCLUSION**

The Zoning Administrator recommends approval of the proposed six rowhouses at 1958 Latham Street. The project supports General Plan policies for street presence and Heritage tree protection, and is consistent with the land use and development direction in the General Plan and Rowhouse Guidelines. Finally, the project successfully adapts to two large existing Coast live oak trees, which will be preserved and protected to continue providing canopy and visual appeal to this site and neighboring sites.

**ALTERNATIVES**

1. Approve the project with modified conditions.
2. Approve the project with site plan modifications to add one guest parking space.
3. Refer the project back to the DRC for additional consideration.
4. Deny the project and/or deny the map.
5. Provide other direction.

**PUBLIC NOTICING**

The Council's agenda is advertised on Channel 26, and the agenda and this report appear on the City's website. All property owners within a 300' radius and other interested stakeholders were notified of this meeting.

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- Attachments:
1. Resolution – Project
  2. Resolution – Tentative Map
  3. Arborist Reports
  4. Project Plans
  5. Revised Site Plan
  6. Tentative Map