



DATE: January 14, 2015  
AGENDA ITEM # 2

**TO:** Design Review Commission  
**FROM:** Zachary Dahl, Senior Planner  
**SUBJECT:** 14-SC-32 – 1274 Thurston Avenue

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Deny the appeal of design review application 14-SC-32 subject to the findings

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**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

This is an appeal of an administrative design review denial for a new one-story house. The project includes demolition of an existing house and construction of a new one-story house that is 3,457 square feet in size. The following table summarizes the project's technical details:

**GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION:** Single-Family, Residential  
**ZONING:** R1-10  
**PARCEL SIZE:** 10,041 square feet  
**MATERIALS:** Slate concrete tile roofing, stucco siding, precast trim and details, vinyl windows and cultured stone veneer

	<b>Existing</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Allowed/Required</b>
<b>COVERAGE:</b>	2,724 square feet	3,511 square feet	3,514 square feet
<b>FLOOR AREA:</b>	2,100 square feet	3,457 square feet	3,314 square feet
<b>SETBACKS:</b>			
Front	33 feet	25 feet	25 feet
Rear	35 feet	25 feet	25 feet
Right side	9.5 feet	10.7 feet	10 feet
Left side	15 feet	10 feet	10 feet
<b>HEIGHT:</b>	15 feet	19.6 feet	20 feet

## **BACKGROUND**

The City requires design review for all new construction, additions and exterior alterations on single-family properties. For projects that are one-story and under 20 feet in height, design review is processed administratively by Planning staff. In the event that an administrative design review application is denied, the decision may be appealed to the Design Review Commission.

In February of 2014, a design review application for a new one-story house at 1274 Thurston Avenue was submitted. During the initial review of the application, staff identified the scale, bulk and mass of the proposed house as being out of character with the surrounding neighborhood. Over the next six months, staff worked with the architect and owners to revise the design in order to comply with the City's Single-Family Residential Design Guidelines and meet the design review findings. However, following multiple rounds of review, staff was still unable to find that the revised house design met the required design review findings. Thus, on August 28, 2014, the design review application was denied. Following the action taken by the staff to deny the project, an appeal was filed by the owners.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Denial Findings**

Thurston Avenue is considered a Consistent Character Neighborhood as defined by the Residential Design Guidelines. This neighborhood is comprised of primarily one-story houses that are lower in scale, simple in form and use rustic building materials. According to the Design Guidelines, in Consistent Character Neighborhoods, good neighbor design has design elements, materials and scale found within the neighborhood and sizes that are not significantly larger than other homes in the neighborhood. Proposed projects should fit in and lessen abrupt changes.

The administrative design review denial is based on the following design review findings per Section 14.76.050 of the Zoning Ordinance:

- The proposed house does not minimize the perception of excessive bulk; and
- The size and scale of the design is not compatible with the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

The project proposes a finished floor elevation that ranges between 12 inches to 33 inches above grade, and wall plate heights that range between 10 and 12 feet. The combination of the tall finished floor and wall heights results in a structure that does not minimize the perception of excessive bulk and is out of scale with the surrounding neighborhood.

### **Appeal**

The owners submitted a letter outlining the basis for why the design of their proposed one-story house complies with the Residential Design Guidelines and meets the required design review findings (Attachment C). The owners assert that the denial should be overturned for the following reasons: 1) The Thurston Avenue neighborhood is in transition and larger house designs are

compatible; 2) The property abuts a large two-story tall church building to the rear (St Simon Catholic Church); 3) The existing swimming pool does not allow for the house finish floor to be any lower than currently designed; and 4) there are other houses in the Thurston Avenue that have wall plate heights of 10 feet and higher. The owners also raise concerns about the subjectivity of the design review process.

### **Alternatives**

This appeal application is *de novo*, which means that the Design Review Commission may consider all aspects of the project and is not limited to the appeal concerns. If the Commission disagrees with the staff action, the Commission could: 1) make positive design review findings and approve the project; or 2) modify the project and/or conditions in order to make positive design review findings. If the Commission votes to approve this project, standard conditions pertaining to tree protection, grading and drainage, green building, fire sprinklers and undergrounding utilities should be incorporated.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

This project is categorically exempt from environmental review under Section 15303 of the California Environmental Quality Act because it involves the construction of a single-family dwelling in a residential zone.

Cc: Lance Wang and Wei Geng Wang, Owners  
Tri Hong, Architect

#### Attachments:

- A. Application
- B. Maps
- C. Correspondence

## FINDINGS

14-SC-32 – 1474 Thurston Avenue

With regard to the new one-story house, the Design Review Commission finds the following in accordance with Section 14.76.050 of the Municipal Code:

- a. The orientation of the proposed project in relation to the immediate neighborhood will NOT minimize the perception of excessive bulk and mass; and
- b. General architectural considerations, including the character, size, scale, and quality of the design, the architectural relationship with the site and other buildings, building materials, and similar elements have NOT been incorporated in order to insure the compatibility of the development with its design concept and the character of adjacent buildings.



# ATTACHMENT A

## CITY OF LOS ALTOS GENERAL APPLICATION

Type of Review Requested: (Check all boxes that apply)

Permit # 1106 309

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	One-Story Design Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sign Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	Multiple-Family Review
<input type="checkbox"/>	Two-Story Design Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sidewalk Display Permit	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rezoning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Variance(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Use Permit	<input type="checkbox"/>	RI-S Overlay
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lot Line Adjustment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tenant Improvement	<input type="checkbox"/>	General Plan/Code Amendment
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tentative Map/Division of Land	<input type="checkbox"/>	Preliminary Project Review	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Appeal
<input type="checkbox"/>	Subdivision Map Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	Commercial Design Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:

Project Address/Location: 1274 Thurston Ave, Los Altos, CA 94024

Project Proposal/Use: Residential

Current Use of Property: Residential

Assessor Parcel Number(s) 318-04-008 Site Area: 10,041

New Sq. Ft.: 3,457 Remodeled Sq. Ft.: 0 Existing Sq. Ft. to Remain: 0

Total Existing Sq. Ft.: 2,100 Total Proposed Sq. Ft. (including basement): 3,457

Applicant's Name: Lance Wang, Wei Geng Wang

Home Telephone #: 650-968-4910 Business Telephone #: 408-242-9388

Mailing Address: 1274 Thurston Ave, Los Altos, CA 94024

City/State/Zip Code: Los Altos, 94024

Property Owner's Name: Lance Wang & Wei Geng Wang

Home Telephone #: 650-968-4910 Business Telephone #: 408-242-9388

Mailing Address: 1274 Thurston Ave

City/State/Zip Code: Los Altos, CA 94024

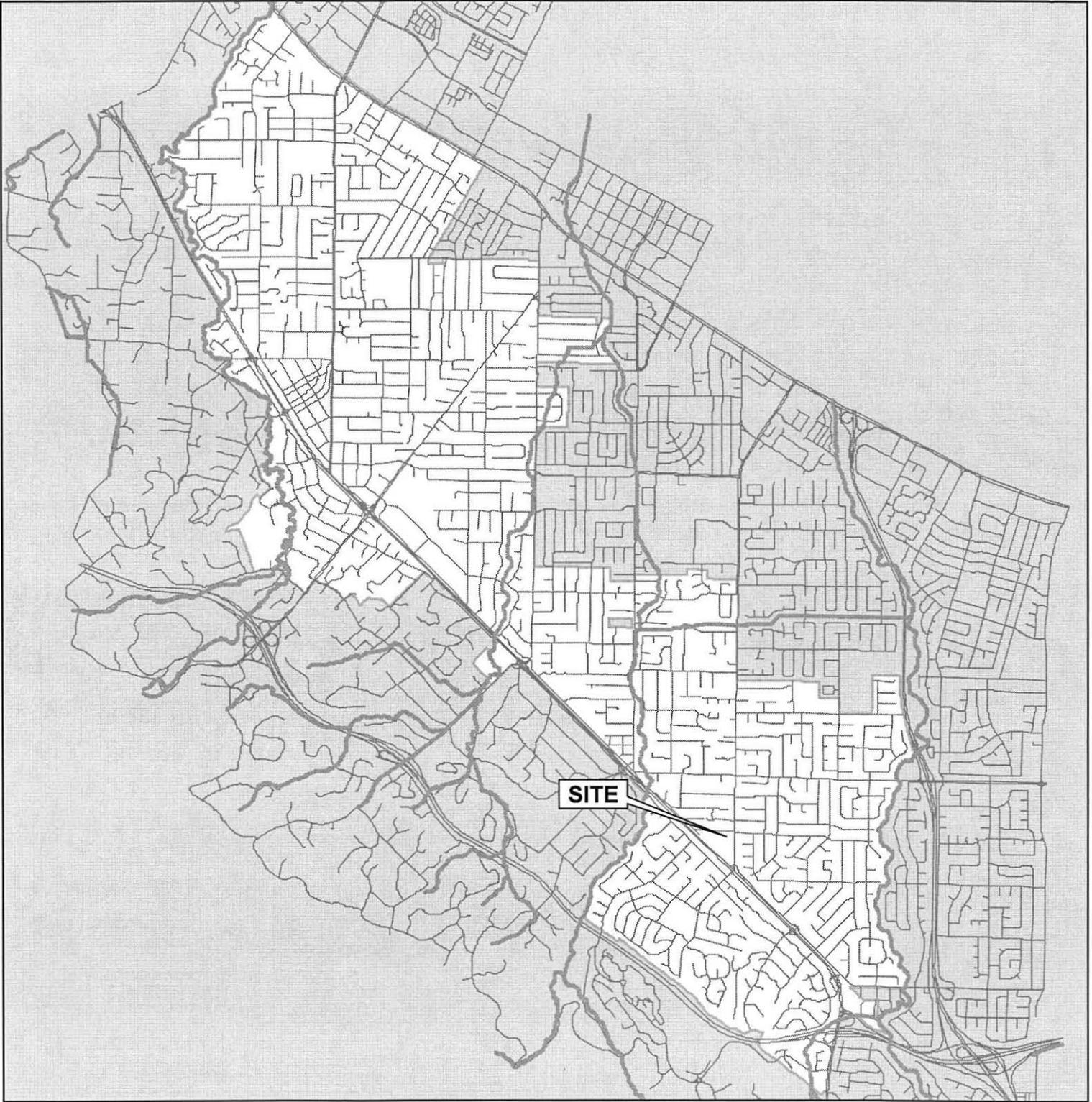
Architect/Designer's Name: Tri Hong Telephone #: 408-829-6083

\*\*\* If your project includes complete or partial demolition of an existing residence or commercial building, a demolition permit must be issued and finalized prior to obtaining your building permit. Please contact the Building Division for a demolition package. \*\*\*

(continued on back)



# AREA MAP



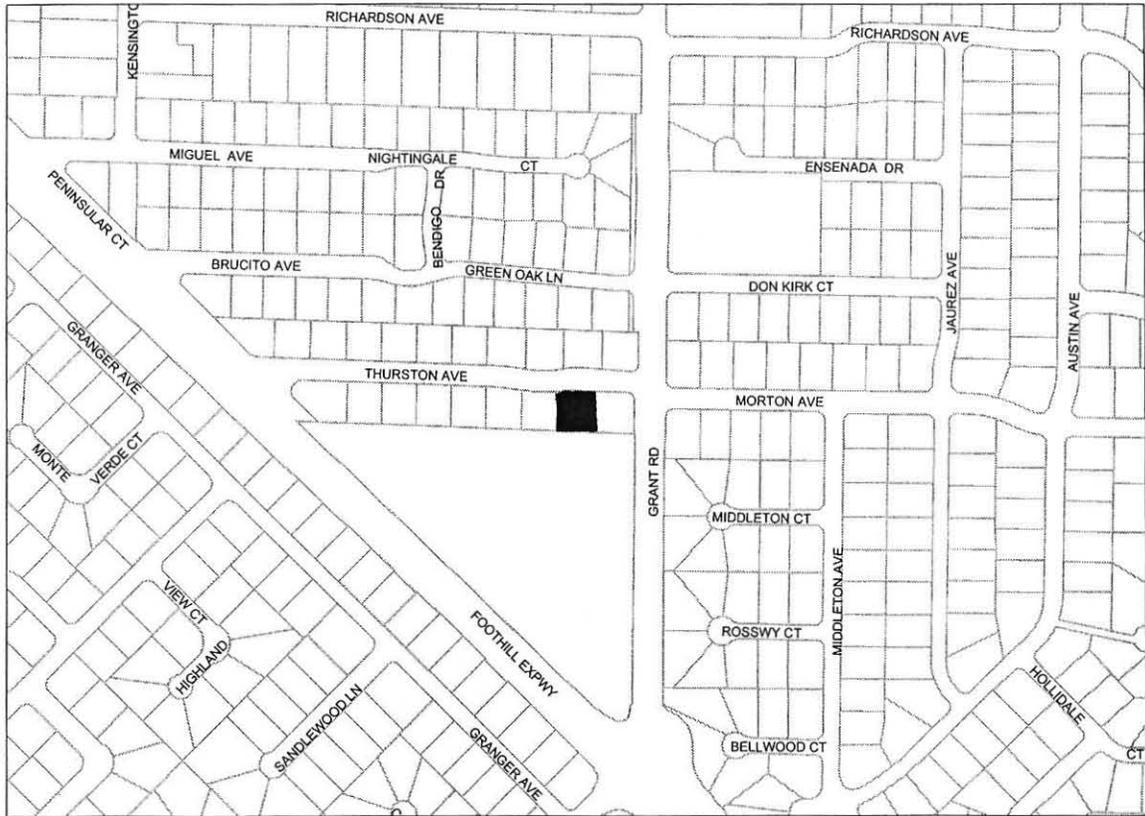
## CITY OF LOS ALTOS

**APPLICATION:** 14-SC-32  
**APPLICANT:** L. and W. Wang  
**SITE ADDRESS:** 1274 Thurston Avenue

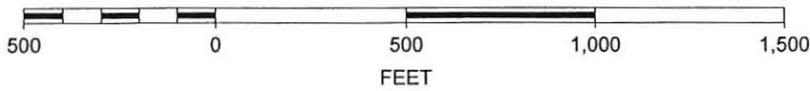


Not to Scale

# VICINITY MAP



SCALE 1 : 6,000



CITY OF LOS ALTOS

**APPLICATION:** 14-SC-32  
**APPLICANT:** L. and W. Wang  
**SITE ADDRESS:** 1274 Thurston Avenue

# ATTACHMENT C

As the owner, I appeal the decision based upon the following reasons:

1. The subject design is strictly following the Single-Family Residential Guidelines even with comfortable margins.
2. The neighborhood has developed a trend with renovation and new buildings. There is only one over 60-year-old single house on the entire street. There are also numerous two-story houses in the neighborhood. There is a big two-story with numerous-room church dormitory building directly adjacent to the backyard of the subject house.
3. Due to the slope of two directions of west-east and south-north and the level of the swimming pool in the backyard, the finished floor elevation of our second-time design reaches the minimum limit for a decent design. The flap-on-grade design suggested by the planner was not compatible with the neighborhood, unreasonable and expensive on earth grading.
4. The wall plate heights are 10 feet on both sides in our design. There are numerous buildings with 10 feet heights in the neighborhood. And, particularly, a newly approved building has 10 feet wall plate heights on three sides and more than 12 feet in front middle. The mentioned building is under construction on the Thurston Avenue's extension, Peninsula Avenue along with the Foothill Express.
5. According to our initial investigation and survey, we have seen the pattern of double standard in the processes of building design evaluation and approval. We request city plan department to release the application data and materials of Los Altos neighborhood.
6. We strongly disagree with the decision from the City planner. There are discrepancies and inconsistencies in the planner's discretion and subjective evaluation with regarding to the City Guidelines. Based upon the design data alone, we can see the design is within the Guidelines with margin. Our single-story house design is well compatible with the neighborhood and there is no perception of excessive bulk.

