



DATE: February 18, 2015

AGENDA ITEM # 2

TO: Design Review Commission
FROM: Sean K. Gallegos, Assistant Planner
SUBJECT: 14-SC-42, 884 Highlands Circle

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve design review application 14-SC-42 subject to the findings and conditions

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This is a design review application for additions to the main and lower level of the existing house. The project includes adding 261 square feet to the main (upper) level, rebuilding the deck and adding 564 square feet to the lower level. The following table summarizes the project's technical details:

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION:	Single-Family, Residential
ZONING:	R1-10
PARCEL SIZE:	11,166 square feet
MATERIALS:	Stucco, vinyl windows and metal and cable railing and membrane roof

	Existing	Proposed	Allowed/Required
COVERAGE:	2,849 square feet	3,034 square feet	3,350 square feet
FLOOR AREA:			
First floor	730 square feet	1,294 square feet	
Second floor	2,279 square feet	2,540square feet	
Total	3,009 square feet	3,834 square feet	3,866 square feet
SETBACKS:			
Front	25 feet	No Change	25 feet
Rear	48 feet	No Change	25 feet
Right side (1 st /2 nd)	24 feet/22 feet	24 feet/17.5 feet	10 feet/17.5 feet
Left side (1 st /2 nd)	10 feet	No Change	10 feet/17.5 feet
HEIGHT:	23 feet	21 feet	27 feet

BACKGROUND

Neighborhood Context

The subject property is located in a Consistent Character Neighborhood, as defined in the City's Residential Design Guidelines. The houses in this neighborhood are a combination of one-story and two-story homes with simple architecture and rustic materials. The landscape along Highlands Circle is varied with no distinct street tree pattern. The property is on a downslope lot in a hillside area.

DISCUSSION

Design Review

In Consistent Character Neighborhoods, good neighbor design has design elements, material, and scale found within the neighborhood. Proposed projects should "fit in" and lessen abrupt changes.

The existing residence is a ranch style with a simple form, low-pitched gable roof, eaves and rustic materials. The addition uses a more Modern style with flat roof and rectangular forms. However, the contrast between these two architectural styles maintains the character of the house and neighborhood with a simple forms and low roof line. The proposed building materials include stucco and vinyl windows that are integral to the design. The proposal introduces a new material with a metal and cable railing, which is a compatible, low profile material consistent with the design character. Overall, the design incorporates simple and low-scale forms that produce an integrated appearance with the context of the area.

Due to the downslope nature of the lot, the project minimizes the bulk and scale of the second story along the street frontage by maintaining a one story appearance consistent with adjacent properties. The first story plate heights are set relatively low, approximately eight feet from the grade, consistent with the eight-foot to nine-foot tall plate heights of existing residences in the neighborhood. On the second floor, the design uses higher wall plates when compared to adjacent houses. However, the massing of the addition is articulated and broken-up with second story decks, which helps diminish bulk concerns. The flat roof design keeps the overall height of the addition low and minimizes its bulk.

The design findings also require that a project not unreasonably interfere with views. Unless there is a view shed or easement across a property, there are no "rights" to a particular view. The intent of the City's view finding is clarified in Section 4.1 of the Design Guidelines and relates to minimizing the visual impact of a project. On hillside lots, dwellings should reflect the topography by following the contours of the site. Moreover, on downslope lots such as the subject site, the roof should be minimized to diminish the visual prominence of a roof.

The height of the addition is 21 feet, which is in scale with other houses within the surrounding neighborhood. The overall height is also minimized by cutting into the natural grade of the lot and lowering the grade approximately four feet. The addition is adequately screened with trees and various landscaping and several mature trees that line the right side and the rear of the property. Overall, staff believes the height of the addition, low-scale roof form and the landscape screening diminishes view impacts to properties from the upslope.

Privacy and Landscaping

On the right side elevation of the second story, one window is added to the expanded family room with a three-foot sill height. On the rear elevation, the design introduces a three panel sliding door opening from the family room onto a covered and uncovered deck that faces both the rear (north) and the right side (east) property lines. The covered deck is in a similar location as the existing second floor deck, with deck being expanded along the uncovered section of the deck.

The views from the decks and windows are minimized by the setback of the windows and cutting into the grade around the structure to lower the grade approximately three to four feet, which maintains the lower second story finished floor height. The applicant has worked with staff to incorporate a six-foot tall fence with lattice and fast growing evergreen screening along the right property line (Condition No. 4). The existing hedges and trees will be maintained along the right side (east) and rear (north) property lines.

The applicant has provided photos showing the following views from the deck: (A) shows a view toward the right side (east), 880 Highland Circle; and (B) shows the view to the immediate neighbor to the rear (north), 941 Oxford Drive (Attachment C). These photos show views from the existing deck with the existing and proposed landscaping adequately mitigates privacy impacts to adjacent properties.

A site section (Sheet A-3.2) has been provided to show the change in grade between the subject property and the immediate property to the right side (east) and rear (north). As shown, the existing and proposed landscaping combined with the location of the deck will adequately mitigate privacy impacts to properties on the down-slope.

The applicant is maintaining 14 of 17 trees in the front and rear yard. The thirteen trees being removed from the site are the following: a bottle brush tree in the front yard, pittosporum sp. in the rear yard, privet in the rear yard and cotoneaster tree in the rear yard. Tree protection guidelines will be followed to maintain the trees during construction. The proposed landscape plan will meet the City's Landscaping and Street Tree Guidelines.

CORRESPONDENCE

Staff received letters from adjacent residents at 880 Highlands Court (right side of subject site) who expressed support for the project and did not have privacy concerns regarding its design (Attachment D).

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This project is categorically exempt from environmental review under Section 15301 of the Environmental Quality Act because it involves an addition to an existing single-family dwelling in a residential zone.

CC: Louie Leu, Applicant/Architect
Sam Azar, Property Owners

Attachments:

- A. Application
- B. Area Map and Vicinity Map
- C. Applicant Letter and Photos
- D. Neighborhood Letter

FINDINGS

14-SC-42 – 884 Highlands Circle

With regard to the first and second story addition to an existing one-story, single-family home, the Design Review Commission finds the following in accordance with Section 14.76.050 of the Municipal Code that:

- a. The proposed addition complies with all provisions of this chapter;
- b. The height, elevations, and placement on the site of the propose addition, when considered with reference to the nature and location of residential structures on adjacent lots, will avoid unreasonable interference with views and privacy and will consider the topographic and geologic constraints imposed by particular building site conditions;
- c. The natural landscape will be preserved insofar as practicable by minimizing tree and soil removal; grade changes shall be minimized and will be in keeping with the general appearance of neighboring developed areas;
- d. The orientation of the proposed addition in relation to the immediate neighborhood will minimize the perception of excessive bulk and mass;
- e. 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 been incorporated in order to insure the compatibility of the development with its design concept and the character of adjacent buildings; and
- f. The proposed addition has been designed to follow the natural contours of the site with minimal grading, minimum impervious cover, and maximum erosion protection.

CONDITIONS

14-SC-42 – 884 Highlands Court

1. The approval is based on the plans received on January 20, 2015 and the written application materials provide by the applicant, except as be modified by these conditions.
2. Only gas fireplaces, pellet fueled wood heaters or EPA certified wood-burning appliances may be installed in all new construction pursuant to Chapter 12.64 of the Municipal Code.
3. The trees in the downslope of the right and rear yard shall be protected under this application and cannot be removed without a tree removal permit from the Community Development Director.
4. Evergreen screening, minimum 15-gallon size, shall be provided along the right (east) side property line, adjacent the family room and deck as approved by staff.
5. The applicant/owner agrees to indemnify, defend, protect, and hold City harmless from all costs and expenses, including attorney's fees, incurred by the City or held to be the liability of City in connection with City's defense of its actions in any proceeding brought in any State or Federal Court, challenging any of the City's action with respect to the applicant's project.
6. **Prior to building permit submittal, the plans shall include:**
 - a. The conditions of approval shall be incorporated into the title page of the plans;
 - b. Verification that all new additions and altered square footage will comply with the California Green Building Standards pursuant to Section 12.26 of the Municipal Code and provide a signature from a Qualified Green Building Professional;
 - c. The measures to comply with the New Development and Construction and Construction Best Management Practices and Urban Runoff Pollution Prevention program, as adopted by the City for the purposes of preventing storm water pollution (i.e. downspouts directed to landscaped areas, minimize directly connected impervious areas, etc);
 - d. The location of any air conditioning units on the site plan and the manufacturer's sound rating for each unit.
7. **Prior to final inspection:**
 - a. All front yard landscaping and privacy screening trees shall be maintained and/or installed as required by the Planning Division; and
 - b. Submit verification that the addition was built in compliance with the City's Green Building Ordinance (Section 12.26 of the Municipal Code).



ATTACHMENT A

CITY OF LOS ALTOS GENERAL APPLICATION

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

Permit # 1106399

<input type="checkbox"/>	One-Story Design Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sign Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	Multiple-Family Review
<input checked="" 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"/>	R1-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 type="checkbox"/>	Appeal
<input type="checkbox"/>	Subdivision Map Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	Commercial Design Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:

Project Address/Location: 884 HIGHLANDS CIRCLE

Project Proposal/Use: RESIDENTIAL

Current Use of Property: RESIDENTIAL

Assessor Parcel Number(s) 342-11-181 Site Area: 11,166 SQ.FT.

New Sq. Ft.: 825 SQ FT Remodeled Sq. Ft.: 121 SQ FT Existing Sq. Ft. to Remain: 2,890 SQ FT

Total Existing Sq. Ft.: 3,011 SQ FT Total Proposed Sq. Ft. (including basement): 3,834 SQ FT

Applicant's Name: LOUIE LEU ARCHITECT - louie@louieleuarch.com

Home Telephone #: _____ Business Telephone #: 408.399.2222 x1

Mailing Address: 236 N. Santa Cruz Ave Suite 210

City/State/Zip Code: Los Gatos, CA 95030

Property Owner's Name: SAM AZAR

Home Telephone #: 650 964-4216 Business Telephone #: 408-621-2272 (CELL)

Mailing Address: 884 HIGHLANDS CIRCLE

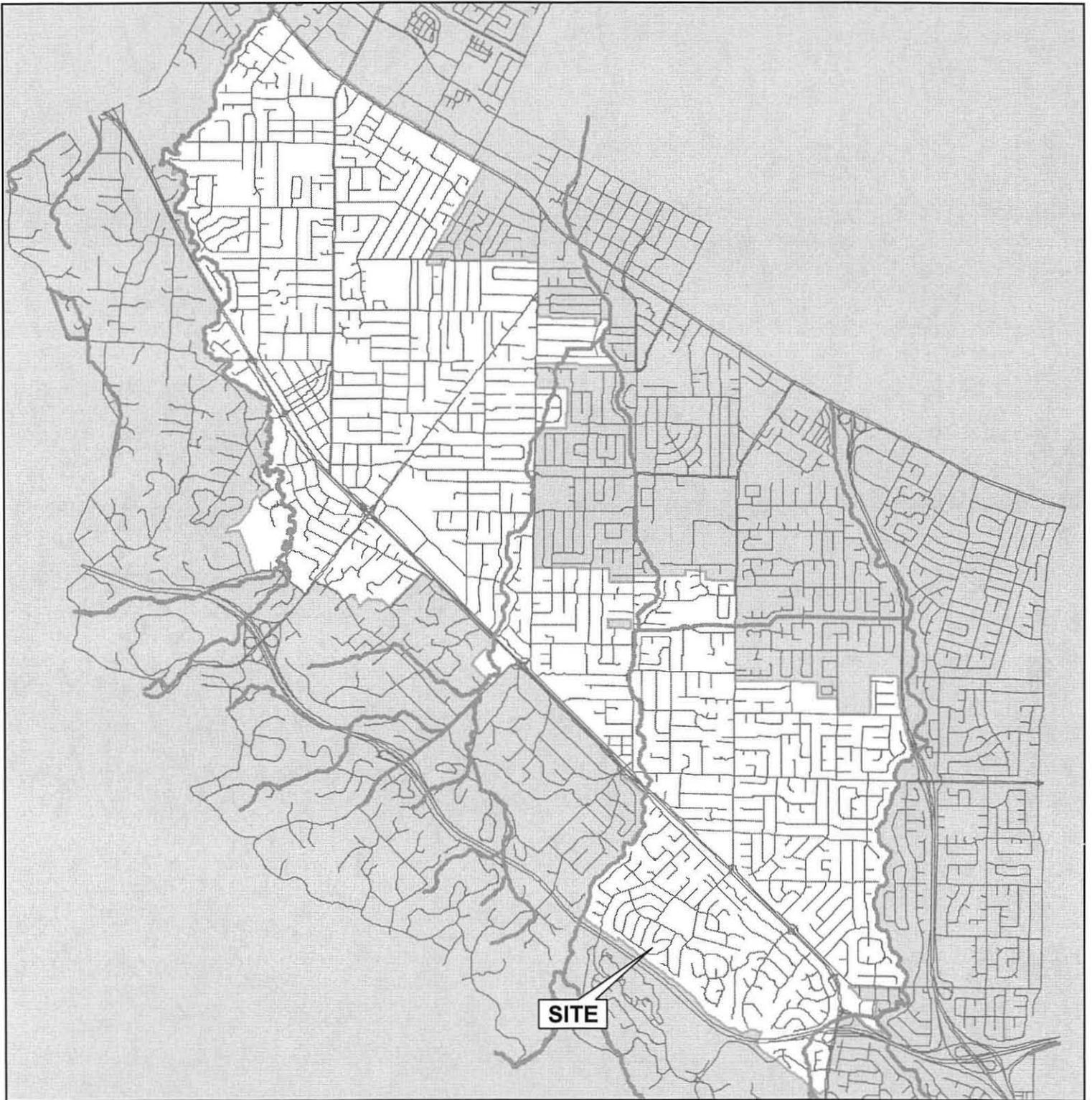
City/State/Zip Code: LOS ALTOS, CA 94024

Architect/Designer's Name: LOUIE LEU Telephone #: 408-399-2222 x1

*** 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-42
APPLICANT: L. Leu Architect /S. Azar
SITE ADDRESS: 884 Highlands Circle

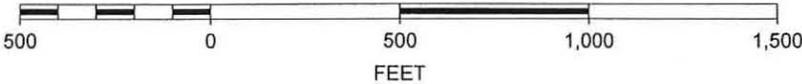


Not to Scale

VICINITY MAP



SCALE 1 : 6,000



CITY OF LOS ALTOS

APPLICATION: 14-SC-42
APPLICANT: L. Leu Architect /S. Azar
SITE ADDRESS: 884 Highlands Circle

Los Altos Community Development Department
Subject: 884 Highlands Circle

Response to Planning staff comment 1a - Privacy

The proposed addition and second floor deck replace an existing second floor deck. While the new deck extends slightly further to the side and rear, the privacy impacts to the adjacent properties are very minimal as both adjacent properties are significantly down slope of 884 Highlands.

To the north (rear), the impact is none. As shown in the photo B attached, the view toward that side is completely over the top of the adjacent property. The top of the roof is lower than the grade at the rear of the property. This is illustrated in Site Section B/A3.2. The staff report calls for a new, 6-foot fence with two-foot lattice along the north property line, however, since there is no privacy impact, we feel this is not necessary.

To the east side, the impact is minimal. As shown in Photo A attached, the view toward that side is currently mostly screened and the elevation level of the adjacent yard is significantly lower. This is further illustrated in Site Section A/A3.2. Photo A also shows the existing and proposed screening.

The current east side landscape screening is approximately 12 feet tall and consists of evergreen Callistemon and deciduous plums and apples along the fence line. There is one opening in the screening to the left of the Callistemon (which views to the neighbors putting green). To the right of the Callistemon are deciduous plums and apple trees. The view through these trees looks onto the roof of the adjacent home. New evergreen screening is proposed in these locations to further mitigate any privacy impacts. The existing deciduous planting will be replaced with new evergreen planting, *Pittosporum Eugenioides*, a fast growing evergreen plant that can be maintained at 12 to 14 foot tall. There is currently a 6 foot fence along the property line that is barely visible through the current screening. A new, 6-foot fence with two-foot lattice along the east property line is shown to replace the current fence.

This adjacent, eastside neighbor has reviewed the plans and has written a letter in support of this project, see attached.

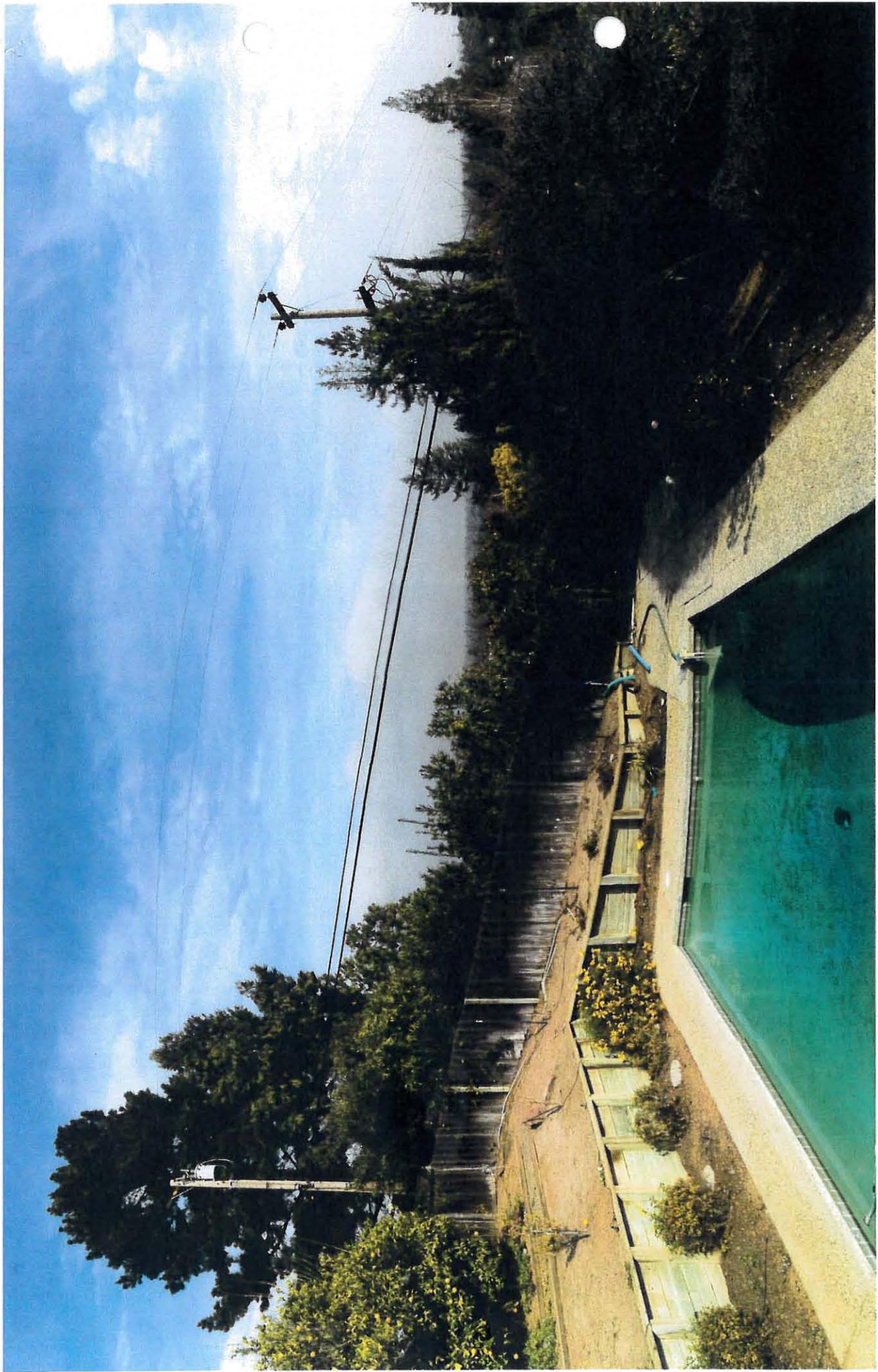
It should be noted that while this is a technically a second story deck, it serves the main floor of the house which is at ground level with the street. This is due to the sideways slope of the lot. The lower level contains primarily the garage space. This is a consistent character with the neighborhood, as many of the homes have sideways sloping lots and as a result, have backyards or decks that serve the second story.



884 HIGHLANDS CIRCLE

VIEW TOWARD EAST FROM PROPOSED DECK/UPPER LEVEL

(A)



884 HIGHLANDS CIRCLE
VIEW TOWARD REAR FROM PROPOSED DECK / UPPER LEVEL

(B)

ATTACHMENT D

Los Altos, January 16, 2015

Dear Review Committee,

I, Gino Blefari, resident and owner of the property located at 880 Highlands Cir, Los Altos, writing you this letter in support of the two-story addition project (Design 2014-1106399) submitted by our neighbors the Azar family (Applicant ID # 1293794), residing at 884 Highlands Cir, Los Altos.

Three weeks ago, Mr Azar showed me the plan submitted to the city and took me on a tour of the proposed construction site. Since I reside downhill from the Azar's residence and given the proposed deck design extending east towards my property line, Mr Azar and I discussed candidly the privacy concerns raised by the city.

I hereby express my full support of this project and I expect the proposed additional natural screening to provide adequate privacy for both sides. I am also willing to reaffirm this support in person in the public hearing if my schedule allows.

Sincerely,

Gino & Joanie Blefari

880 Highlands Cir

Los Altos, 94024, CA

Signature

Gino Blefari
Joan Blefari

Date:

1/16 2015