



CITY OF BURLINGAME PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

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| Agenda Item: 6c | Hearing Date: December 8, 2025 |
| Project Nos. | DSR24-0025 |
| Location | 1385 Hillside Circle - Lot 3 APN: 027-282-050 |
| Applicant and Architect/Designer | James Chu - Chu Design Associates, Inc. |
| Property Owner | Sherman Chiu and Jen Ngo |
| Staff | Catherine Keylon, Senior Planner |
| General Plan Designation | Low Density Residential |
| Zoning | R-1 (Low Density Residential) |
| Lot Area | Existing Parcel: 36,955 SF Proposed Lot 3: 13,226 SF (proposed Parcel 1 on tentative map) |

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Review of an application for Major Design Review, Hillside Area Construction Permit and Special Permits for declining height envelope and attached garage to construct a new two-story single-unit dwelling and attached garage on a newly created lot in the R-1 (Low Density Residential) zoning district.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission, by resolution, approve the applications for Major Design Review, Hillside Area Construction Permit, and Special Permits as conditioned.

BACKGROUND

The project site ("Property") is currently one 36,955 square foot parcel that is a through lot, bounded by Hillside Circle to the north and Easton Drive to the south, with a steep downward slope toward Easton Drive. The existing dwelling on the site is approximately 11,300 square feet and contains two stories, plus a basement. The site has two accessory structures including an approximately 1,856 square foot detached garage in the northeastern corner of the site and an approximately 661 square foot detached garage in the southwestern corner of the site. The existing house and a detached garage fronts Hillside Circle and the second detached garage fronts Easton Drive. The site contains four trees, consisting of three protected size Oak trees (18.8, 19.1 and 26.4 inches in diameter) and one Acacia tree. The Acacia tree is not a protected sized tree (8-inch diameter) and is proposed to be removed. There is an African fern pine tree off-site to the east.

In 2019 there were unlawful tree removals on the site. There were several protected size trees removed, in addition to a significant number of shrubs, unprotected size trees and other foliage removed from the rear of the site, abutting Easton Drive. A Tree Removal Permit was applied for in 2023 for removal of a Redwood tree and Coast Live Oak tree; that permit was appealed and following a hearing was ultimately approved by the Beautification Commission.

The applicant submitted an application to subdivide the lot into three separate lots and construct a new two-story single-unit dwelling on each of the newly created lots. The applicant is requesting the following applications:

- Major Design Review for a new, two-story single-unit dwelling and attached garage (C.S. 25.68.020.C.1.a.);

- Special Permit for an attached garage (C.S. 25.10.035.1.);
- Special Permit for declining height envelope along the right and left sides of the single-unit dwelling (C.S. 25.10.055); and
- Hillside Area Construction Permit for a new, two-story single-unit dwelling and attached garage (C.S. 25.70.020.A.).

The subdivision and entitlements for each of the three lots were first reviewed at the September 22, 2025 Planning Commission meeting as a study item where the Commission provided design recommendations. A public hearing for these applications was held at November 10, 2025 Planning Commission meeting, where the Commission recommended approval of the Tentative and Final Parcel Map to the City Council, and approved the entitlements for Design Review, Hillside Area Construction Permit, and Special Permits for declining height envelope and attached garage for the construction of a new single-unit dwelling and attached garage on Lots 1 and 2. The Planning Commission expressed concerns with the design proposed for the proposed dwelling unit on Lot 3 and voted to continue the action for Lot 3 until those concerns were addressed by the applicant.

The City Council held a public hearing on December 1, 2025 and approved the Tentative and Final Parcel Maps to subdivide the parcel at 1385 Hillside Circle into three separate lots. The entitlements being considered for this application are for Lot 3.

ANALYSIS

The applicant proposes the construction of a new, two-story single-unit dwelling with an attached garage. The total proposed floor area would be 3,950 SF (0.29 FAR), where 5,332 SF (0.40 FAR) is the maximum allowed on the 13,226 square foot lot (including a 78 SF front porch exemption). Lot 3 represents the only proposed lot to have pedestrian access directly from Easton Drive to the new dwelling by way of stairs and a path.

The property is located within the Hillside Overlay Zone. Code Section 25.20.040 states that hillside development shall be designed to preserve existing distant views. View preservation shall be limited to obstruction of distant views to San Francisco Bay, the San Francisco Airport, and Mills Canyon from primary indoor living areas, such as living rooms and family rooms (Code Section 25.20.040 (B)).

The proposed dwelling on Lot 3 would contain five bedrooms (den qualifies as a bedroom per C.S. 25.108.030). Three parking spaces, two of which must be covered, are required for a five-bedroom house. The proposed attached garage would provide two covered parking space (20'-0" x 20'-0" clear interior dimensions) where 20'-0" x 18'-0" is the minimum required. Two uncovered parking spaces (20'-0" x 25'-0") are provided in the driveway. The application includes a Special Permit for an attached garage.

The lot slopes steeply from the front to the rear property line, with an average slope of 19.6 to 31.6%. This steep slope affects the declining height envelope measurement resulting in a Special Permit request for declining height envelope for a 593 SF encroachment along the right side of the dwelling and a 44.38 SF encroachment along the left side.

The entire site contains five existing landscape trees. One of these trees is a Coast Live Oak tree located on the downslope of the lot, in the rear along the western property line. This tree would remain and tree protections are proposed during construction. Based on the proposed floor area, four landscape trees are required on-site. The existing Coast Live Oak tree in the rear yard that is

being protected counts toward meeting this requirement. The landscape plan shows five new trees to be planted. Four of these trees will be in the rear yard fronting Easton Drive and include two 24-inch box Trident maple trees and two 24-inch box Pacific Madrone trees. There will also be one 24-inch box size Ginkgo Biloba tree to be planted in the front yard. Therefore, the project complies with the Urban Reforestation and Tree Protection Ordinance requirements. In addition, a comprehensive landscape plan has been provided with hardscape and softscape at the front and terraced at the rear of the property. An arborist report was prepared by Kielty Arborist Services, dated February 16, 2024, and is included as part of the plan set and is attached for reference.

Table 1: Project Information

Table 1 below compares the proposed project to the development standards for a single-unit dwelling based on the R-1 zoning district.

| | ORIGINAL PLANS 10/14/25 | REVISED PLANS 11/17/25 | ALLOWED/REQ'D |
|--|---|---------------------------|---|
| Front Setback (main flr): (lower flr): (attached garage): | 21'-2" N/A(no street frontage) 26'-3" | no change | 16'-9" (block average) N/A (no street frontage) 25'-0" – garage (2 doors) |
| Side Setback (left): (right): | 7'-0" 7'-0" | no change | 7'-0" 7'-0" |
| Rear (main flr): (lower flr): | 121'-9" 109'-0" | no change | 15'-0" 20'-0" |
| Lot Coverage: | 3,087 SF 23.3% | no change | 5,290 SF 40% |
| FAR: | 3,950 SF 0.29 FAR | no change | 5,332 SF ¹ 0.40 FAR |
| Off-Street Parking: | 2 covered (20'-0" x 20'-0 clear interior) 2 uncovered (20'-0" x 26'-0") | no change | 2 covered (20' x 18' clear interior) 1 uncovered (9' x 18') |
| Building Height: | 16'-0" | 15'-0" | 20'-0" ² |
| Plate Height (main flr): (lower flr): | 9'-0" 9'-0" | no change | 9'-0" 9'-0" |
| DH Envelope: | Special Permit requested for DHE encroachment along right and left sides ³ | no change | C.S. 25.10.055.A.1. |

¹ (0.32 x 13,226 SF) + 1,100 SF = 5,332 SF (0.40 FAR)

² Per C.S. 25.30.040.A.2. height is limited to 20'-0" above average top of curb on lots with a slope of 20% slope or greater.

³ Special Permit requested for declining height envelope (593 SF extends beyond the DHE along right side of house and 44.38 SF extends beyond the DHE along the left side of the house).

Design Review

Municipal Code Section 25.68.60.C. establishes the criteria for Major Design Review for single-unit dwellings as follows:

1. Consistency with any applicable design guidelines;
2. Compatibility of the architectural style with that of the existing character of the neighborhood;
3. Respect for the parking and garage patterns in the neighborhood;
4. Architectural style and consistency and mass and bulk of structures, including accessory structures;
5. Interface of the proposed structure with the structures on adjacent properties;
6. Landscaping and its proportion to mass and bulk of structural components; and
7. In the case of an addition, compatibility with the architectural style and character of the existing structure as remodeled.

The proposed project has been designed in accordance with the Residential Design Guidelines, R-1 zoning district development standards, and all other applicable standards. While the architectural style is modern, the surrounding area is comprised of a mix of architectural styles and the proposed house includes features that complement the context of the other homes in the area, including a sloped roof at the front of the dwelling, wood garage doors, a solid wood front entryway door with side lights, aluminum clad wood windows, and horizontal wood and stucco siding. The proposed design has articulated massing and will be integrated into the neighborhood with the use of quality materials and architectural elements. Staff does not have any suggested changes for the Planning Commission to consider.

Summary of Proposed Exterior Materials:

- **Windows:** aluminum clad wood with simulated true divided lites
- **Doors:** solid wood entry door with glass sidelights, wood garage door with raised panel
- **Siding:** 6-inch horizontal wood siding, stucco
- **Roof:** standing seam metal roof at front with torch down flat roof at rear
- **Other:** stainless steel railing with cable guardrail

November 10, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting

At the Planning Commission action meeting on November 10, 2025, the Commission had several suggested changes and voted to place this item on the Consent Calendar when all information has been submitted and reviewed by the Planning Division.

The applicant submitted revised plans, date stamped November 17, 2025, and renderings to address the Planning Commission's comments. Below is a summary of the Commission's comments and changes made to the project:

1. Coordinate with the Parks Superintendent/City Arborist to revise the landscape plans to include taller and faster growing evergreen tree species at the rear of the property.
 - One additional 24-inch box landscape tree has been added to Lot 3, increasing the number of proposed new 24-inch box trees to five (see revised sheets L1 and L5). Two of the new trees proposed in the rear yard have been changed from Marina Madrone to Pacific Madrone, which has a height of 80 to 125 feet at maturity.

2. Incorporate a sloped roof across the width of the house on the Hillside Circle side. The sloped roof doesn't need to be over the entire house, just over approximately the first one-third, with a flat roof over the remainder of the house.
 - The roof over the front one-third of the dwelling has been revised to a sloped standing seam metal roof (see revised sheets A.3.2 through A.7). The roof over the rear two-thirds of the dwelling remains flat.
3. Address the width of the stairs off Easton Drive and provide a solution for a gate across the stairs.
 - A gate has been added at the Easton Drive stair access at the rear of the property; the width of the stairs remains the same (see revised sheets A.2.1 and L1).

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

A Categorical Exemption Qualification memorandum was prepared by David J. Powers (attached) to evaluate and document whether any of the exceptions to the use of a categorical exemption that are listed in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 apply to the proposed project and to assess the project's eligibility for a Class 3 Categorical Exemption from CEQA under Section 15303, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures. Specific criteria must be met in order for a project to be found exempt, with six categories of exceptions to the use of categorical exemptions, including: Location, Cumulative Impact, Significant Effect, Scenic Highways, Hazardous Waste Sites, and Historical resources.

The analysis concluded that none of the exceptions contained in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 apply, which allows the project to qualify for a CEQA exemption under 15303, Class 3. Class 3 Categorical Exemption allows three single-family residences to be constructed in an urbanized area. The project proposes demolishing the existing improvements on-site to construct one of three new single-unit dwellings in an urbanized residential area. The project would be consistent with the General Plan designation and zoning district. Therefore, the proposed project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption under Class 3 of the CEQA Guidelines.

Attachments:

Area Map
Arborist Report
CEQA Categorical Exemption Qualification Memorandum and Appendices
Resolution
Renderings
Proposed Plans dated November 17, 2025
Previous Plans dated October 14, 2025