



CITY OF BURLINGAME

PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Agenda Item: 7a	Hearing Date: October 27, 2025
Project Nos.	DSR24-0023, DSR24-0024, DSR24-0025
Location	1385 Hillside Circle - Lots 1, 2 and 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 1: 10,545 SF (proposed Parcel 3) Proposed Lot 2: 13,184 SF (proposed Parcel 2) Proposed Lot 3: 13,226 SF (proposed Parcel 1)

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Review of an application for Tentative and Final Parcel Map for Lot Merger and Subdivision, Major Design Review, Hillside Area Construction Permit and Special Permits for declining height envelope and attached garage to construct one new, two-story single-unit dwelling on each of the three newly created lots in the R-1 (Low Density Residential) zoning district.

This staff report addresses the proposed development at 1385 Hillside Circle, providing a project overview followed by individual summaries for each of the three potential lots: Lot 1, Lot 2 and Lot 3.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission, by resolution, approve the Major Design Review, Hillside Area Construction Permit and Special Permits for Lot 1, Lot 2 and Lot 3 as conditioned, and recommends approval of the Tentative and Final Parcel Map for Lot Merger and Subdivision to the City Council.

BACKGROUND

The project site 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.

PROPOSAL SUMMARY

The applicant has submitted an application to demolish all existing structures on-site, subdivide the parcel into three individual lots, and construct three, two-story single-unit dwellings with one residence on each lot. Each of the three new properties would front directly on Hillside Circle with no access from Easton Drive, with the exception of Lot 3 which would have pedestrian access directly from Easton Drive to the new dwelling by way of stairs and a path. The project would include the construction of a new driveway for each of the three proposed lots from Hillside Circle.

The subject 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 map action for the proposed project includes a Tentative and Final Parcel Map to combine three existing parcels and subdivide into three new parcels for the development of a single-unit dwelling on each parcel. The three new parcels meet the required street frontage and lot size, and the Public Works Department has determined that the proposal is in compliance with the Subdivision Map Act.

Following the Planning Commission study meeting on September 22, 2025, staff met with the Public Works Department and Fire Department to discuss comments received at the study meeting regarding consideration to have some development front on Easton Drive. Public Works and Fire staff noted that the proposed plan with development fronting only on Hillside Circle is preferred for several reasons. The lot slope average is greater than 20 percent, with the lot sloping downward towards the rear on the Easton Drive frontages, causing more complex issues with drainage and slope stability. Furthermore, the curvature and narrow street width (30 feet) of Easton Drive would complicate development making ingress and egress difficult and unsafe on a street with higher traffic volume than Hillside Circle.

1385 Hillside Circle – Lot 1

Lot 1 (Parcel 3 on Tentative Parcel Map) is located on the far east side of the project site and would measure 10,545 square feet in area. The applicant proposes the construction of a new, two-story single-unit dwelling with an attached garage. The total proposed floor area would be 4,255 SF (0.40 FAR), where 4,474 SF (0.42 FAR) is the maximum allowed (including a 175 SF front porch exemption).

The proposed dwelling on Lot 1 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 spaces (20'-0" x 20'-0" clear interior dimensions) where 20'-0" x 18'-0" is the minimum required. Two uncovered parking spaces (24'-0" x 28'-3") 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 106.1 SF encroachment along the right side of the dwelling and a 99.82 SF encroachment along the left side.

The entire site contains five existing landscape trees; two of which are located directly in front of Lot 1, but not within the property boundaries. One is a Black Acacia tree, that is proposed to be removed, and the other is an African fern pine tree that would remain. Six 24-inch box size trees would be planted as part of the development on Lot 1; two in the front yard fronting Hillside Circle and four in the rear yard fronting Easton Drive. There will be three Marina Madrone trees, two Maidenhair trees and one Trident Maple tree. Based on the proposed floor area, three landscape trees are required on-site. 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 attached for reference.

The applicant is requesting the following applications (Lot 1):

- 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.).

Table 1: Project Information for 1385 Hillside Circle - Lot 1

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

	PROPOSED	ALLOWED/REQ'D
Front Setback (main flr): (lower flr): (attached garage):	20'-0" N/A (no street frontage) 28'-3"	16'-9" (block average) N/A (no street frontage) 25'-0" – garage (2 doors)
Side Setback (left): (right):	7'-0" 7'-3"	7'-0" 7'-0"
Rear (main flr): (lower flr):	43'-5" 35'-1"	15'-0" 20'-0"
Lot Coverage:	3,146 SF 29.8%	4,218 SF 40%
FAR:	4,255 SF 0.40 FAR	4,474 SF ¹ 0.42 FAR

¹ (0.32 x 10,545 SF) + 1,100 SF = 4,474 SF (0.42 FAR)

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	PROPOSED	ALLOWED/REQ'D
Off-Street Parking:	2 covered (20'-0" x 20'-0" clear interior) 2 uncovered (24'-0" x 28'-3")	2 covered (20' x 18' clear interior) 1 uncovered (9' x 18')
Building Height:	15'-6"	20'-0" ²
Plate Height (main flr): (lower flr):	9'-0" 9'-0"	9'-0" 9'-0"
DH Envelope:	Special Permit requested for DHE encroachment along right and left sides ³	C.S. 25.10.055.A.1.

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 (106.1 SF extends beyond the DHE along right side of house and 99.82 SF extends beyond the DHE along the left side of the house).

Summary of Proposed Exterior Materials:

- **Windows:** aluminum clad wood with simulated true divided lites and wood trim
- **Doors:** stained wood entry door, wood garage door with raised panels
- **Siding:** wood siding with 6-inch exposure, stucco, stainless steel welded wire mesh (3" openings) on lower crawl space
- **Roof:** standing seam metal
- **Other:** 6x wood outriggers, 12" wood band

ANALYSIS

The proposed project has been designed in accordance with the Residential Design Guidelines and R-1 zoning district development standards. While the architectural style is contemporary, the proposed house contains traditional elements, such as horizontal wood and stucco siding, simulated true divided lite aluminum wood clad windows with wood trim, and wood outriggers. These materials help soften the contemporary features and help make the design complimentary to the context of the other homes on the block. The proposed design has articulated massing and will be integrated into the neighborhood with the use of these quality materials and architectural elements. Staff does not have any suggested changes for the Planning Commission to consider.

1385 Hillside Circle – Lot 2

Lot 2 (Parcel 2 on Tentative Parcel Map) would measure 13,184 square feet in size and would be located between Lots 1 and 3. The applicant proposes the construction of a new, two-story single-unit dwelling with an attached garage. The total proposed floor area would be 4,359 SF (0.33 FAR), where 5,319 SF (0.40 FAR) is the maximum allowed (including a 141 SF front porch exemption).

The proposed dwelling on Lot 1 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'-6" x 23'-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 162.44 SF encroachment along the right side of the dwelling and a 201.58 SF encroachment along the left side.

The entire site contains five existing landscape trees, one of which is a Coast Live Oak tree that is located directly in front of Lot 2, but not within the property boundaries. Lot 2 contains a second tree (of the five existing on the entire site) and it is also a Coast Live Oak tree that is located on the downslope of the lot, in the rear along the western property line. Both of these trees would remain and tree protection measures 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 four new trees to be planted, all of which will be in the rear yard fronting Easton Drive. and there are four 24-inch box size Marina Madrone trees proposed to be planted as part of the development on Lot 2. 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 attached for reference.

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.).

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Table 2: Project Information for 1385 Hillside Circle - Lot 2

Table 2 below compares the proposed project to the development standards for a single-unit dwelling based on the R-1 zoning district.

	PROPOSED	ALLOWED/REQ'D
Front Setback (main flr): (lower flr): (attached garage):	20'-0" N/A (no street frontage) 26'-6"	16'-9" (block average) N/A (no street frontage) 25'-0" – garage (2 doors)
Side Setback (left): (right):	7'-0" 7'-5"	7'-0" 7'-0"
Rear (main flr): (lower flr):	78'-3" 73'-6"	15'-0" 20'-0"
Lot Coverage:	3,133 SF 23.8%	5,274 SF 40%
FAR:	4,359 SF 0.33 FAR	5,319 SF ¹ 0.40 FAR
Off-Street Parking:	2 covered (20'-0" x 20'-0" clear interior) 2 uncovered (20'-6" x 23'-0")	2 covered (20' x 18' clear interior) 1 uncovered (9' x 18')
Building Height:	17'-2"	20'-0" ²
Plate Height (main flr): (lower flr):	9'-0" 9'-0"	9'-0" 9'-0"
DH Envelope:	Special Permit requested for DHE encroachment along right and left sides ³	C.S. 25.10.055.A.1.

¹ (0.32 x 13,184 SF) + 1,100 SF = 5,319 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 (201.58 SF extends beyond the DHE along right side of house and 162.44 SF extends beyond the DHE along the left side of the house).

Summary of Proposed Exterior Materials:

- **Windows:** aluminum clad wood with simulated true divided lites and wood trim
- **Doors:** wood entry door with opaque glass, wood French doors, wood garage door with raised panel
- **Siding:** wood siding with 6-inch exposure, stucco
- **Roof:** composition shingles
- **Other:** 6x wood outriggers, 18" square wood columns, wood trellis

ANALYSIS

The proposed project has been designed in accordance with the Residential Design Guidelines and R-1 zoning district development standards. The proposed house is complimentary to the context of the other homes on the block with a craftsman-inspired, traditional architectural style. The exterior materials include a wooden trellis covered front porch, hip and gable roofs, wood front and garage doors, wood columns, wood bellybands, wood outriggers and knee braces, and composition shingle roofing, consistent with the craftsman/traditional architectural style found on other homes in the area. 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.

1385 Hillside Circle – Lot 3

Lot 3 (Parcel 1 on Tentative Parcel Map) would measure 13,226 square feet in size and would be located on the far west side of the project site. 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 (including a 78 SF front porch exemption).

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 which is a Coast Live Oak tree that is located on the downslope of this proposed Lot 3, 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 which will be in the rear yard fronting Easton Drive. There are two 24-inch box Trident maple trees, two 24-inch box Marina Madrone trees, and one 24-inch box Maidenhair tree proposed to be planted as part of the development on Lot 3. 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 attached for reference.

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.).

Table 3: Project Information for Lot 3

Table 3 below compares the proposed project to the development standards for a single-unit dwelling based on the R-1 zoning district.

	PROPOSED	ALLOWED/REQ'D
Front Setback (main flr): (lower flr): (attached garage):	21'-2" N/A (no street frontage) 26'-3"	16'-9" (block average) N/A (no street frontage) 25'-0" – garage (2 doors)
Side Setback (left): (right):	7'-0" 7'-0"	7'-0" 7'-0"
Rear (main flr): (lower flr):	121'-9" 109'-0"	15'-0" 20'-0"
Lot Coverage:	3,087 SF 23.3%	5,290 SF 40%
FAR:	3,950 SF 0.29 FAR	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")	2 covered (20' x 18' clear interior) 1 uncovered (9' x 18')
Building Height:	16'-8"	20'-0" ²
Plate Height (main flr): (lower flr):	9'-0" 9'-0"	9'-0" 9'-0"
DH Envelope:	Special Permit requested for DHE encroachment along right and left sides ³	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).

Summary of Proposed Exterior Materials:

- **Windows:** aluminum clad wood with simulated true divided lites
- **Doors:** wood entry door with glass sidelights, wood garage door with raised panel
- **Siding:** 6-inch horizontal wood siding, stucco
- **Roof:** composition shingles
- **Other:** stainless steel railing with cable guardrail

ANALYSIS

The proposed project has been designed in accordance with the Residential Design Guidelines and R-1 zoning district development 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 four-sided pitched roof at the front entry, 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.

September 22, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting

At the Planning Commission study meeting on September 22, 2025, the Commission had several suggestions regarding the proposed projects on Lots 1, 2 and 3, and voted to place this item as an Action Item when all information has been submitted and reviewed by the Planning Division.

The applicant submitted revised plans, date stamped October 14, 2025, to address the Planning Commission's comments. Below is a summary of the Commission's comments and changes made to the project:

1. Provide a detailed landscape plan specifically showing the number, species, and mature height of trees throughout each of the sites.
 - The landscape plans for Lots 1, 2 and 3 have been revised to show the number, species and mature heights of trees (see Preliminary Landscape Plans and information under 'Proposed Plant Palette' on the Preliminary Planting Plans for each lot). Additional trees have been added to the rear yards fronting Easton Drive, which amount to a total of 10 new trees to be planted across the three lots along Easton Drive.
2. Provide a rendering from the Easton Drive vantage point showing landscape elements, including property fences and trees indicated on the landscape plan.
 - A rendering from Easton Drive has been provided that shows landscape elements.
3. Lot 1 - Consider redesigning the stucco fascia above the main entry door and window at front of house so that it's not so heavy.
 - The stucco fascia at the front elevation above main entry door and window has been redesigned to include a stepped feature with a capped with a horizontal trim element (see revised Sheet A.4).

4. Lot 2 - Headers at entrance door, French doors, windows, and garage doors at front of house should all be at the same height.
 - The header at the garage doors has been raised to match the headers of the other doors and windows along the front of the house; all headers are at the same height (see revised Sheet A.4).
5. Lot 3 - Soften the modern aesthetic; encourage designer to explore ways to mitigate the boxy and over-modern design look of the facade as it relates to the neighborhood. One potential idea could be using a low-pitched roof used in Eichler homes.
 - A four-sided hip roof has been added above the entrance and stucco finished headers, with an 18-inch projection, have been added at windows and garage door at the front of the house to soften the modern aesthetic (see revised Sheet A.4).
6. Lots 1, 2 & 3 - Add weather protection (roof) over the side garage door entrances.
 - A roof over the side garage door entrances for each new dwelling has been provided (see revised Left Elevations for each lot).
7. Lots 2 & 3 - Reduce the size of the stairway windows.
 - The size of the stairway windows for the proposed dwellings on Lots 2 and 3 have been reduced (see revised Right Elevation for Lot 2 and revised Left Elevation for Lot 3).

Design Review Criteria

The criteria for design review as established in Ordinance No. 2000 adopted by the City Council on December 6, 2021 are outlined 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.

Environmental Review

A Categorical Exemption Qualification memo 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.

PC/10/27/2025

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1385 Hillside Circle – Lots 1, 2 and 3

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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 three 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

Public Works Department Memorandum

Public Comment Emails

Resolution

CEQA Categorical Exemption Qualification Memorandum and Appendices

Renderings

Proposed Plans – Lots 1, 2, and 3 dated October 14, 2025

Previous Plans – Lots 1, 2, and 3 dated August 27, 2025