



REPORT to the LA MESA PLANNING COMMISSION

DATE: February 19, 2025

SUBJECT: PROJECT 2023-2859

DESCRIPTION: CONSIDERATION BY THE CITY OF LA MESA PLANNING COMMISSION OF PROJECT NO. 2023-2859 (GATESIDE) – A REQUEST FOR A SPECIAL PERMIT TO ALLOW FOR A SIX-FOOT-HIGH RETAINING WALL WITH CUT THAT EXCEEDS SIX FEET WITHIN THE SIDE YARD SETBACK ON A VACANT LOT LOCATED ON GATESIDE ROAD (499-030-49-00) IN THE R1S (SUBURBAN RESIDENTIAL) ZONE.

ISSUING DEPARTMENT: Community Development

SUMMARY:

Issue(s):

1. Should the Planning Commission approve a Special Permit to allow for six - foot retaining wall with a cut that exceeds six feet within the side yard setback of a vacant lot located within the Suburban Residential zone?

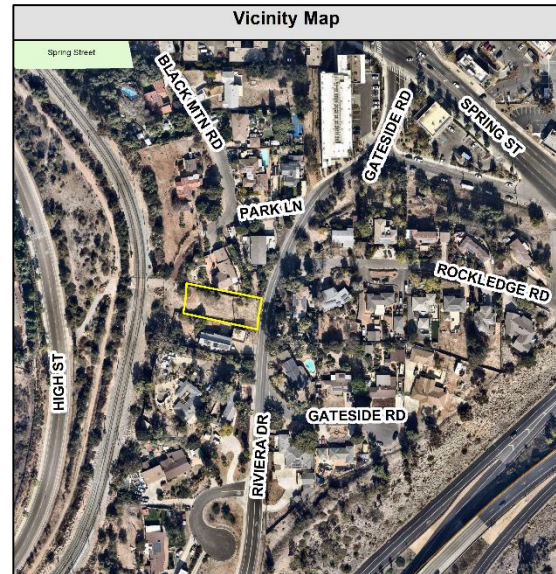
Recommendation:

1. To adopt a resolution approving the Special Permit, subject to the conditions of approval (Attachment 1).

Environmental Review: The project is exempt from environmental review in accordance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15303. Section 15303 states that project of “new construction or conversion of small structures” are exempt. The project meets all the conditions necessary to qualify for the exemption and none of the exceptions listed in Section 15300.2 apply.

BACKGROUND:

The subject property, rectangle shaped lot, is a 0.26-acre (11,326 square foot) in size and it is located on the west side of Gateside Road. The lot is situated between the San Diego & Arizona Eastern Railway Company tracks (Orange Line Trolley Line) to the west and Gateside Road/Riveria Drive to the east. The project site is located within the R1S (Suburban Residential) zone, with a General Plan Land Use designation of Suburban Residential, which applies to neighborhoods where lots are 10,000 square feet in size or larger, resulting in lower density developments with relatively large yards and space between residences. Existing development on Gateside Road/Riveria Drive is primarily single-family residential. The property slopes downhill from west to east and is currently undeveloped.



The proposed project is a request for a Special Permit to construct a retaining wall. In residential zones retaining walls within a required setback shall not exceed a height needed to retain (i) a fill of three feet or (ii) a cut of six feet. The Planning Commission may authorize a Special Permit to allow for increased fill limits for retaining walls. The commission shall review the request and required findings must be made, as per La Mesa Municipal Code (LMMC) Section 24.02.050. The findings include that the project proposals shall be evaluated in terms of view obstruction, scale in relation to other structures in the vicinity, structure design, and offensive characteristics of potential use.

DISCUSSION:

The Special Permit application would allow for the construction of an over height retaining wall within the side yard setback to help create a level area to develop the property and construct a single-family residence and accessory structures. To accommodate the slope of the site, the wall height will progressively increase from one and half feet to twelve feet. The Special Permit requested is for the section of wall which would exceed a cut of more than six feet within the side yard setback.

La Mesa is a hillside community, and many properties have sloped topography that may require grading and retaining walls for new development. The applicant is proposing grading the subject property and installing retaining walls to create level areas for structures, exterior walkways, and courtyards, and driveway slopes that would meet the City's parking standards. Due to the topography of the site the proposed construction

would require building a retaining wall with a cut of more than six feet within the side yard setback. Walls that exceed a cut of more than six feet within a required setback require a Special Permit to be reviewed and approved by the Planning Commission. The retaining wall will be situated in the front, side, and rear yard setback from the adjacent properties to the north and south. The retaining wall would have minimal impact to the surrounding neighbors since the wall would primarily be visible to the proposed development. The retaining wall is located five feet away from the southern property line and would be located within the side yard setback and outside of the rear yard setback. The retaining walls will be located at a similar elevation as the surrounding properties and partially obscured by the use of gates to minimize the visual impact. The proposed landscaping across the site will minimize the visual impact for the properties located downhill to the east (Attachment 2)

A Special Permit is required to retain cut exceeding six feet within the 5-foot side yard setbacks. Pursuant to LMMC 24.050.030I maximum fill limits for retaining walls within setbacks may be increased by Special Permit approved by Planning Commission. To grant a Special Permit, findings must be made and sufficient facts must be provided to make those findings. Staff analysis shows that the proposed project meets the required findings as described below:

1. The location and characteristics of the proposed project and the allowed use of them impact unfavorably upon adjacent properties.

The proposed project, a concrete block wall, within the side yard setback, with landscaping and set behind side yard gates that reduce visibility of the wall from off-site of the property, would not impact unfavorably upon adjacent properties. The retaining wall will be situated into the existing topography and inset from the property line and the adjacent properties to the north and south. The side yard section of the wall which is proposed to exceed a six-foot cut would likely be visible only from the proposed development and therefore there would be minimal if any impact on the neighboring properties. The areas surrounding the retaining walls, driveway, and residence are proposed to be landscaped, which will further minimize any potential for visual impact to adjacent properties. The use of cement block retaining wall will not obstruct to the view and due to topographic conditions, it would not be out of scale in relation to other structures in the vicinity. Therefore, construction of the proposed project would not impact unfavorably upon adjacent properties.

2. The project consistent with the design objectives established as policy of the City Council.

The retaining wall is designed to fit within the context of the neighborhood through the use of materials and landscaping. The neighborhood is characterized by lower density development, relatively large yards, and scenic views. The retaining wall

allows for development of the site consistent with the surrounding neighborhood, while maintaining the existing scenic features of the site. The proposed project is proposed to integrate with the hillside features and landscaping that currently exists on the site. The proposed project will be set behind a side yard gate and will be located in an area on site that will not be visible from the public right of way due to the topography of the site. Existing site photographs are shown in Attachment 3.

CONCLUSION:

Based on review of the proposed plans and the findings of fact discussed above, staff recommends that the Planning Commission adopt the Special Permit resolution (Attachment 1) approving Project No. 2023-2859, subject to conditions of approval.

Respectfully submitted by:



Patrick Macpherson
Assistant Planner

Reviewed by:



Jared Chavez
Assistant Director of Community Development



Lynnette Santos
Director of Community Development

Attachments:

1. Special Permit Resolution
2. Plan Set
3. Site Photos