



REPORT to the LA MESA PLANNING COMMISSION

DATE: April 16, 2025

SUBJECT: Project No. 2024-0705

DESCRIPTION: CONSIDERATION BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF LA MESA OF PROJECT NO. 2024-0705 (ELASAAD) – A REQUEST TO ALLOW FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A 6 FOOT RETAINING WALL WITH A 6 FT. OF CUT, EXCEEDING THE 4FT MAXIMUM HEIGHT ALLOWED WITHIN THE FRONT YARD SETBACK; VACANT LOTS LOCATED ON HIGH STREET (475-351-28-00, 475-351-29-00, 475-351-30-00) 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 the construction of a 6 foot retaining wall with a 6 ft. of cut, exceeding the 4ft maximum height allowed within the front yard setback?

Recommendation:

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

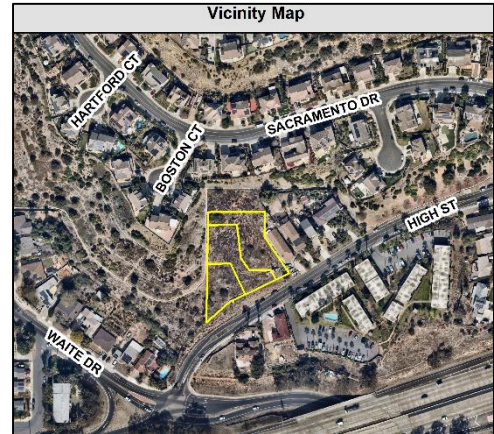
Environmental Review:

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 project site is 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.

The proposed project is comprised of 3 irregular shaped lots, of varying size; a 10,019 square foot (0.23-acre) lot, a 13,939 square foot (0.32-acre) lot, and a 16,117 square foot (0.37-acre) lot. The project site is located on the west side of High Street, situated between Sacramento Drive to the north and Waite Drive to the west. Existing development on High Street is primarily single-family residential. The property slopes downhill from north to southwest and is currently undeveloped.



The applicant is proposing grading the subject property and installing retaining walls to create a common driveway for access to the parcels that would meet the City's parking standards and allow for further development of the site. The Special Permit request is to exceed the wall height and maximum cut allowed within the front yard setback. The zoning code states that 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. However, the Planning Commission may authorize a Special Permit to allow for increased cut and height limits for retaining walls. The commission shall review the request and findings of fact 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 site topography ranges and sits approximately 6 to 10 feet above street level. To accommodate the slope of the site, the wall height will have a maximum height of 6 feet and would partially encroach within the front yard setback of two of the three parcels (APNs 475-351-29-00 and 475-351-30-00). Pursuant to LMMC 24.050.030I maximum cut and height limits for retaining walls within setbacks may be increased by Special Permit approved by Planning Commission. The Special Permit requested is for the sections of

the wall which would exceed a cut of more than 6 feet within the front setbacks of two of the three parcels.

The proposed driveway, would meet the City's parking standards and allow for access and development of the site and the project would be conditioned to record a maintenance agreement for maintaining the driveway and retaining wall and an access easement to allow for access to all parcels from the shared driveway.

Visual impacts of the retaining wall would be reduced by landscaping around the wall and driveway area across all three parcels. Landscape screening will be included as a condition of the project approval. An Encroachment Maintenance and Removal Agreement has also been included as a condition for the portion of the wall proposed in the public right-of-way.

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

The proposed 6 foot wall within the front yard setback(s) would not impact unfavorably upon adjacent properties. The area surrounding the retaining walls and driveway, is proposed to be landscaped, which would minimize visual impacts to adjacent properties and would be constructed into the existing topography to the extent possible. The walls are proposed to give vehicular access to the recently subdivided parcels for future development and improvements and would maintain the visual character of the neighborhood. Additional 8 trees will be incorporated into the project design. No project features will impact the western view from High Street, and the on-site landscaping would minimize the visual impact of the wall as seen from west of the development. Any future development would be required to meet all design standards and zoning regulations as required by the La Mesa Municipal Code.

2. Is 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 and relatively large yards. The retaining wall allows for development of the site consistent with the surrounding neighborhood, while maintaining the existing scenic features of the site including the unimpeded

western view, sloped topography of the hillside, and limited development within the neighborhood. The proposed project is proposed to integrate with the hillside features and incorporate landscaping to reduce the visual impact of the retaining wall.

**CONCLUSION:**

Based on review of the proposed plans and the findings of fact discussed above, staff recommends that the Planning Commission adopt the resolution (**Attachment 1**) approving Project No. 2024-0705, subject to conditions of approval.

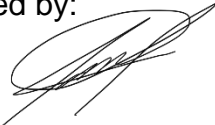
Respectfully submitted by:



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Patrick Macpherson  
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Reviewed by:



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Lynnette Santos  
Director of Community Development

Attachments:

- 1) Draft Planning Commission Resolution
- 2) Plan Set