

April 14, 2013

LUPC Staff Report, by James Murez

Project Site: 742 Brooks, Oakwood Subarea

**LUPC Motion:** Approve the project as presented.

### **Summary of Neighborhood Outreach Meeting**

The applicant conducted a neighborhood outreach meeting on March 16, 2013 at the proposed development site. About 35 neighbors showed up to participate. The staff person from the Venice Neighborhood Council, Land Use and Planning Committee was James Murez. He helped to facilitate the meeting along with the applicant Ramin Kolahi.

The applicant showed an elevation rendering and plot plans, which showed the project layout on the site. The applicant described how his project complies to all Venice Specific Plan code and is not requesting any variances from LAMC.

The project consists of a small lot subdivision where he proposes to take the two parcels and divide them into four separate lots.

The existing building was used as an apartment building, it is currently vacant. There were five units in a duplex and triplex, two of which were determined to be affordable by LAHD. Of the five, one was used as storage, one used by the prior owner, two affordable and one vacated in 2005. The site is now vacant and fencing has been installed to keep out trespassers.

The applicant explained there is a preference to use prefabricated construction methods offsite and delivered to the project location mostly constructed. This form of construction is uncommon at present but reduces the construction cycle from several years to a couple of months thereby reducing the impacts of noise and other construction disturbances substantially.

Furthermore, the project is being developed to try to achieve LEED certification. This means it will be very environmentally friendly not only once it is completed, but for example to achieve this level of certification, the developer is looking to recycle some of the existing building.

The project will consist of four single family houses, one per lot after the subdivision is approved. Each house is being designed for a wide range of buyers, mostly families by providing three or four bedrooms. The square footage of each is about 2,500 SF. Each of the homes will include an enclosed two car garage on the rear of the lot. The garage is a detached building with automobile access off the alley. There will be a large courtyard space between the front house and the garage building of about twenty-five feet for a small garden.

All setbacks and building heights will conform to code as defined by LAMC, the Venice Specific Plan and the Small Lot Ordinance. No exceptions or variances are being requested. Because each of the houses are SFD no guest parking is being provided, however, with the rear yard setback to the garage it is possible for a guest to block the garage and not obstruct the alley.

The neighbors had comments about the applicant's renderings of the project. Several people thought the size of the buildings would look out of place on this block. They referenced a neighbor's house that

was two doors to the west as being an example of more acceptable architecture. The woman that was the architect was at the meeting and commented she also lived there. She expressed concerns about having four identical looking structures sitting so close would cause the project to look out of place.

One neighbor commented that although street parking was not a problem and although her house has a two car garage so when she is out running errands during the day she normally parks on the street, she was still concerned that not enough off street parking was going to be provided. The day of this meeting many of the people that were attending parked on the street. There was ample street parking available. However, this site is within one block of Lincoln Blvd and as we continue to see that street come more alive, street parking might not always be so easy to come by even on a Saturday morning in winter.

Several of the neighbor comments talked about how the project looked out of place. Some comments were made about only building two larger homes rather than the proposed four. These comments led to a talk about the price point of the proposed homes which the applicant described to be in the range of first home buyers and stated the target was going to be under \$1.4m. He went on to say that his firm had surveyed the area and found although \$2.8m houses were selling in the area they wanted to try and keep with the concept of first time home buyers – young families just starting out as their target customer.

There was some talk about widening the street in front of the project site. The applicant explained the city has rules when doing a subdivision that might force him to push the curb back thereby widening the street. The net effect is typically a loss of a few street parking spaces until the other properties on the street also are forced to widen the street. Because this improvement is not required when building a SFD almost all of the other new construction in the Oakwood neighborhood has not been required to dedicate this extra street width. The applicant would therefore seek to get community support to allow him to make the dedication and post a bond to do the improvements but ask the city to not make these changes to the curb line at this time. The neighbors seemed in support of this concept as it would not reduce street parking, which would occur if the improvements were done now.

The applicant also informed that LAFD is requesting a hydrant and believes if this condition is required, it will also cause street widening. The applicant points out a hydrant within 160' and 300' from the site, according to applicant, well within the 600' required by code.

Some of the architect neighbors that were at the meeting had suggestions how rearranging the buildings on the lots might reduce the visual impact of having four identical structures next to each other. They felt that just having different facade materials and varying colors was not going to break up the look enough to fit into the neighborhood. The applicant and some of the neighbors planned a follow up meeting to explore some of the possibilities.

Subsequent to this meeting, the applicant met with three neighbors on April 6, 2013 (two of which are architects mentioned above) and reported a positive meeting where they seek to take back many of the ideas to their to be engaged architect as they continue designing the building facades.

The meeting went on for a little over one hour.

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