

Planning Commission - 779 San Carlos , El Granada

Introduction

This response is from Kathleen and Richard Klein, owners of the adjacent house at 771 San Carlos Ave.

We ask that the county reject this application until it is revised with plans that conform to riparian and wetland setbacks as required by the county, and until the plans correctly show the riparian boundary and conformance to riparian and/or wetlands setbacks.

Although we have other concerns related to the height of the house and its impact on our light and view, I will leave most of that discussion to our neighbors.

Montecito Riparian Corridor

The county long ago restricted development within the Montecito Riparian Corridor. “The County of San Mateo Local Coastal Program categorizes riparian corridors as environmentally sensitive habitat areas, and strictly regulates development within and adjacent to such areas.”

<https://www.smcgov.org/planning/san-mateo-county-montecito-riparian-corridor>

Our first experience with the riparian restrictions was when we bought our house at 771 San Carlos Ave, adjacent to the parcel. Since it seemed clear that only a very small structure could be built in a conforming way, we were not concerned about development. Before buying the property, we read about the previous development attempt which was denied by the county due to illegal clearing. That decision also required replanting of the affected riparian vegetation. That replanted vegetation is still growing back, an important point in evaluating the willow canopy today.

Our second experience was when we sought a permit to expand our deck. The county denied our permit since the deck would get closer than 50 feet from the arroyo willow canopy, which defines the riparian zone. It did not matter that the footprint on the ground would not expand. No expansion, from any floor, would be allowed into the riparian buffer. We were also not eligible for the 30-foot alternative. So we repaired the deck, with permits, conforming to the restrictions placed by the county, without expanding the existing footprint, in the air or on the ground. Live by the rules...

Summary of concerns

Our concerns with the currently posted plans are threefold.

1. The developer's plans do not match measurements on the ground. As a result the relevant buffer zones would be illegally developed. In particular, the willow canopy extends well into the lot near the street, near the back of the proposed dwelling, and in the rear. Only this last fact is reflected in the developer plans.
2. The developer's plans seem to assume that intrusions into the buffer zone from higher stories are permissible. This has not been our experience. The county was adamant that we could not extend our deck into the buffer.
3. The developer denies the existence of wetlands, but our experience shows that every winter the lower portions of the property are flooded.

1. Buildable width is only 8 feet, assuming riparian buffers (including exceptions)

We photographed the current enclosing fence, with 5-foot intervals clearly marked. Required buffers are 5 feet from the property line and 30 feet from the riparian vegetation (arroyo willow trees).



The 50-foot mark on the fence is the approximate property line. The willow canopy in the front of the lot extends to about the 43' line. There is other vegetation to the left of the willows, but that is French broom or other plants that are not normally considered riparian vegetation. Note that in the background (middle of the lot) the willows extend even further into the lot.

If we subtract the 5 foot and 30 foot buffers from the 43-foot mark that shows the riparian boundary, we are left with **8 feet of buildable width**, which conforms roughly to our estimates when we bought our adjacent property. This is enough room for a small cabin,

Since the plans require a much wider building, they should be rejected until they conform with the required riparian buffers.

■ PROPOSED FLOOR PLAN (NOT ALL DETAILS MAY BE SHOWN):



NOTE: 3RD LEVEL NOTE: 3RD LEVEL TO BE VAULTED CEILING

20 FEET SETBACK

20 FEET SIDEYARD SETBACK

DECK

M.BED 247 SF

M.BATH 66 SF

BED #1 126 SF

BED #2 126 SF

HALLWAY

CL.O. 18 SF

CL.O. 18 SF

M.CLO 48 SF

B.CLO 40 SF

GLASS RAILING

SCALE: As indicated

DESIGNER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ACCURACY OF DIMENSIONS, AREA AND ALL DIMENSIONS. CONTRACTOR SHALL BE RESPONSIBLE TO THE DESIGNER'S PRIOR CONTRACTOR'S ATTENTION.

A7

ARCHITECTURAL

3

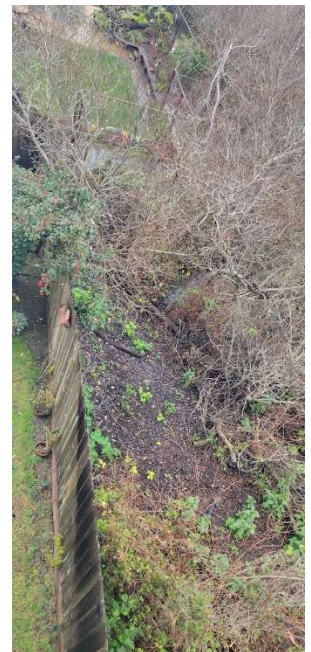
survey things due to the dense tangle of willow “jungle”, but there is plenty of typical wetland vegetation such as horsetail visible from Balboa looking up the hill. A neighbor who braved the brush and ticks to explore up the stream has stated that there are pools and obvious wetland all up the stream. If this is a “wetland” then a 100-foot buffer applies, or 50-feet if that makes it unbuildable.



Recent photo showing horsetail, ferns and other wetland vegetation visible from Balboa looking up toward the property.



Left - Recent photo showing sandbags lined up below the property on Balboa, in preparation for normal winter flooding. Our small dog Charlie for scale.



Right – Perspective from our deck looking toward are with winter flooding.



Left – Channel built by downhill property owners on Lacasia lot, directing water away from adjacent property and creek. February 2025, not a wet year.

Below – Standing water after minor February flooding.



Conclusion

Please reject this proposal. The buffer zones on the plan are not credible and even on its face it does not conform with required buffers. The county should be protecting the creek, and the wildlife that depend on it. We support infill development and have supported every recent development proposal in the neighborhood. This proposal is not infill, but rather a disallowed extension into protected areas.

Richard and Kathleen Klein

771 San Carlos Ave, Half Moon Bay CA 94019

kathyandrich@richk.com



July 21, 2025

Chair Carlos Serrano-Quan and Planning Commissioners
455 County Center, 2nd Floor
Redwood City, CA 94063

Re: PLN2021-00478 (Lacasia): Consideration of the adoption of an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/ND), pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and Coastal Development Permit, Design Review, and Variance, pursuant to Sections 6328.4, 6565.3, and 6531, of the County Zoning Regulations, to allow the construction of a new 1,670 sq. ft., three-story, single-family residence with an attached 371 sq. ft. garage and 791 sq. ft. Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) on a legal 7,070-sq. ft. parcel, in the unincorporated El Granada area of San Mateo County. A Variance is required to allow a front yard setback of 3 feet where 20 feet is required, due to the site location within the Montecito Riparian Corridor and associated 30-foot riparian setback. The ADU is a ministerial project that does not require review by the Planning Commission. The project is appealable to the California Coastal Commission.

Dear Chair Serrano-Quan and Commissioners,

On behalf of Green Foothills, I write in opposition to the above-referenced project.

On February 25, 2025, I sent Planning staff a comment letter which focused on the presence of wetlands on this property. My letter, which notes that **Arroyo Willow (*Salix lasiolepis*) is both a riparian and wetland species**, was not included in your packet for your July 23 hearing, nor is it referenced in the Staff Report. This is a significant omission.

For purposes of this hearing, I am including the letter's salient points regarding the status of the Arroyo Willow as both riparian and wetland species.

Ms. Toni Corelli, notable coastal botanist and author, included Arroyo Willow in a YouTube presentation on wetland plants found on the San Mateo Coast, please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWGmng8B29o>

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At 13:33 is the description of *Salix lasiolepis*, Arroyo Willow — the most common willow along the San Mateo Coast. Ms. Corelli states that **Arroyo Willow is found in both riparian and wetland habitats.**

Arroyo Willow Thickets have also been documented on otherwise steep, dry coastal hillsides where they occur in isolated wetland areas created by seeps and springs. A notable example is at the Pilarcitos Quarry, where the Vegetation Map for the Quarry's Mining and Reclamation Plan documents a dozen or more "Arroyo Willow Thickets" on steep hillsides; the accompanying text (page 21: "Biological Resources, Section 3.11.2 Vegetation") states: **"Thickets of willows also occur frequently on steep hill slopes where seeps and springs may occur"**. See: Pilarcitos Quarry – Area H Mining and Reclamation Plan Revised December 2010, prepared by LSA Associates.

The Coastal Commission's Staff Biologist/Staff Ecologist in two relevant San Mateo County cases, have also determined that Arroyo Willow is both a riparian and wetland species:

1. In the Staff Report for the "Rhodes Mixed-Use Development", 505 San Pedro Road, Pacifica, the Coastal Commission's Staff Biologist states: **"Under the Coastal Act, the arroyo willow thickets delineate as a wetland on the basis of their facultative wetland indicator status and therefore, must be treated as wetlands under Coastal Act Section 30233 rather than ESHA under Coastal Act Section 30240"**.
<https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2023/3/W14a/W14a-3-2023-corresp2.pdf>
2. In a Dispute Resolution matter, regarding an undeveloped parcel on Hermosa Avenue, El Granada, the Commission's Staff Ecologist, Dr. Lauren Garske-Garcia, visited areas immediately surrounding the site at issue, reviewed the relevant project materials, and concluded based on the available evidence that: **"...the Arroyo Willow thicket should be considered a wetland under the Coastal Act and the LCP"**. <https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2019/11/W27a/W27a-11-2019-report.pdf>

Green Foothills also is concerned that the proposed Findings for the Variance (to allow only a 3-foot front yard setback when 20 feet is required), cannot be met. Finding "a" that the parcel's location, size, shape, topography and/or other physical conditions vary



substantially from other parcels in the vicinity is unsupportable, inasmuch as there are numerous similar undeveloped parcels within the Montecito Riparian Corridor and/or its 50-foot buffer zone, per San Mateo County's Map 1/28/2014. Finding "b" that the landowner would otherwise be denied the rights and privileges that are enjoyed by other landowners in the same zoning district is similarly unsupportable.

Green Foothills recognizes the difficulty of full compliance with the required 50-foot minimum wetland setback, or for that matter, the less restrictive riparian setback on the LaCasia property. However, a three-story, 2,832 sq. ft. single family residence, garage, and ADU is simply too large for this challenging site, given the property's significant Coastal Act/LCP and environmental constraints.

We urge your Commission to continue this item to a date uncertain in order for the Applicant to come back with a significantly scaled back project that more fully complies with the required wetland and front yard setbacks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lennie Roberts". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lennie Roberts
Legislative Advocate
Green Foothills

This is in regards to the San Mateo Planning Commission meeting July 23, 2025, agenda item 2, Elizabeth Lacasia file PLN2021-00478, San Carlos Ave, APN 047-105-020

From: David & Jennifer Allen, owners/residents of 736 San Carlos Avenue, El Granada
davefghi@gmail.com, jen@jendaveallen.com

We request that the Planning Commission should reject this application in its current form and keep the established setbacks intact. This house requires a large number of variances because the lot isn't suitable for a building of this size. The main variances requested are encroachment into the riparian zone, being situated too closely to a fire hydrant, and reducing the front yard setback from 20 feet to 3.3 feet.

If you just look at the lot size, the proposed house seems fine. But most of this lot is a riparian zone that is home to some protected flora and fauna. The proposed design cuts into the riparian zone in at least one area and deep into the required buffer zone on almost every side. In addition, the proposed decks will hang over the buffer and into the riparian zone, which is something that has never been allowed for any other house on this street.

The riparian zone is also critical in moderating water flow and preventing downstream flooding. The neighbors directly below this lot have already had issues with flooding, and the increase in storm activity is only going to make this problem worse. The developer's plans ignore this issue and make no mention of any flood mitigation plans. If you look at this lot after a storm, it's easy to see how much water is actually caught and held by the current vegetation. Removing that vegetation will adversely affect both the proposed house and the neighbors on the street below.

Reducing the front yard from 20 feet to 3.3 feet may not sound like much, but this street is a private road and it's already narrower than a standard street. That means there are no storm drains and only a few on-street parking spots. Most people on the street park in their driveway, but this house won't have a driveway. There is a two car garage in the plans, but the house is quite large and it includes an ADU. It's highly unlikely that all of the cars that will be associated with this house will fit in the garage, and that's assuming they use the garage for cars and not just storage. One car has already been sideswiped on the street when a delivery van tried to turn around, and the garbage truck needs to back up the street. Adding more cars to that without a proper driveway adds to this issue and could cause additional accidents or prevent emergency vehicles from reaching the houses at the end of the cul-de-sac.

The location of the house also violates the regulations about clearance for the fire hydrant, which will only be a few feet from the corner of the garage. So not only will fire trucks have a hard time getting to the end of the street, they may also not be able to get the hydrant if the owners are parked too closely to it. This could be catastrophic if there ever is a fire in any of the houses at this end of the cul-de-sac.

Finally, we believe that the proposed house is a poor fit for the existing neighborhood. As you can see in the included pictures, the proposed house towers above the existing house next to it. With the way it sits right on the street, it becomes the only thing you can see as you drive up the street. This issue is exacerbated by the fact it would be the only three-story house on the street.

For all these reasons, we request that the Planning Commission reject this application as it currently stands. A smaller house with no ADU could certainly fit in this lot and a two car garage could work for a single family. But the proposed house is much too large for the space and for the available parking. We strongly believe that this project needs to be scaled down before it is approved.



Sincerely,
David & Jennifer Allen

Planning Commission - 779 San Carlos Ave, El Granada

We, Susana and Roel van Bezooijen have lived at 730 San Carlos Ave since 1990. We are responding to the proposed plan for 779 San Carlos Ave. Please consider our comments and concerns about it for the upcoming Planning Commission Meeting on July 28, 2021. Primarily we strongly support the environmental issues addressed in the Kleins' letter to the Planning Commission. Our additional concerns are listed below:

- 1) Our primary concern with the proposed design for 779 San Carlos Ave is the very small area of the lot that is legally available for building. Even with a successful appeal to the Coastal Commission to reduce the buffer zone to the riparian area from 100' to 50', as well as attaining a variance from the 20' required distance from the street to 13', the buildable portion of the lot would only support a footprint of less than 80 sq. ft. We encountered a potential buyer who considered this lot when it was being sold at below market price in 2003. He said that although the lot was inexpensive, he decided against it because the legal restrictions which he was aware of, would not allow for enough space to build the structure he wanted. The building proposed now is unrealistic for the constraints on this lot.
- 2) The request for a variance to reduce the front yard setback from 20' to 3.3' will not allow for parking in front of the house. This is of particular concern due to the additional parking required for the occupants of the ADU, which is part of the proposed dwelling. Furthermore, there is a sign on the street side of the property line saying "**NO PARKING FIRE LANE.**" Also, the fire hydrant in front of the lot will further reduce parking space.
- 3) The design of the proposed house doesn't conform to the 2004 Midcoast Standards for Residential Design. The overall height, roofline and proximity to the street do not fit with the other houses on the downhill side of San Carlos Ave. The proposed house would be one floor taller than any other house on the that side of the block. (2004 Standards for Design for One Family and Two Family Residential Development in the Midcoast p. 12,13, 21). Are these standards no longer considered?

We attached two drawings showing the imposing scale of the proposed house relative to the very large neighboring house. It towers 8.5' above the neighboring house and its garage is approximately 20 feet closer to the road.

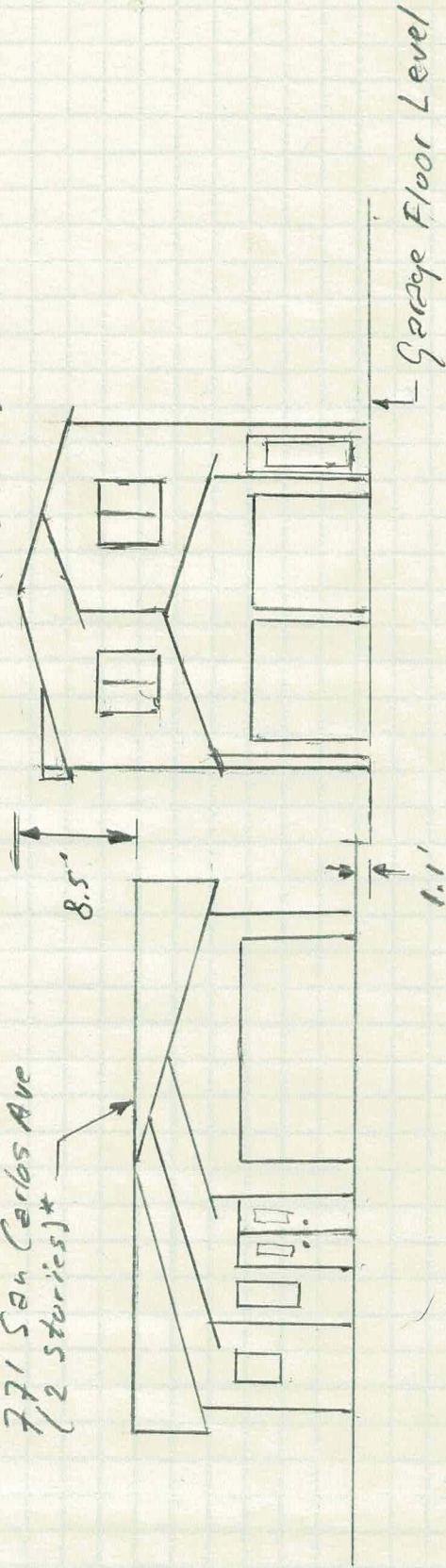
Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. Please reject the proposed development.

Best Regards,

Susana and Roel van Bezooijen
730 San Carlos Ave. El Granada 94018
svanb9@gmail.com
July 22, 2021

Proposed home at
779 San Carlos Ave
(3 stories)**

Existing house at
771 San Carlos Ave
(2 stories)*



Rod van Bezooijen
250316

Fig. 1

*) one above street level
**) two above street level

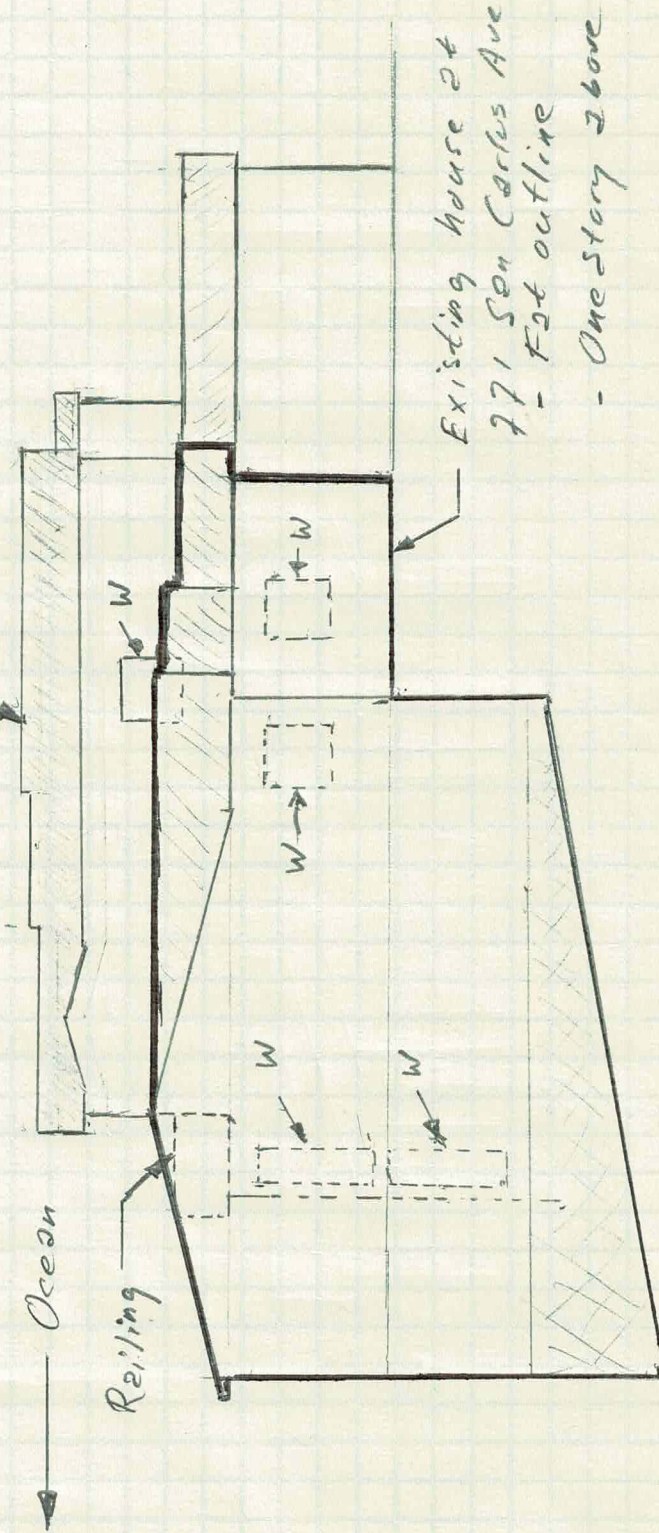
Elevation as seen from street

W = window in
proposed home
facing existing
house

Proposed home at 779 San Carlos Ave
- Two stories above street level **

→ Ocean

Railing



Existing house at
771 San Carlos Ave
- 1st outline

- One story above street *

*) 2 total

**) 3 total

Fig 2

Rue van Beersdijk
250316

Side Elevation