



HISTORIC DISTRICT

Bluff Park Neighborhood Association

September 9, 2019

Julianna Roosevelt, Chair
Cultural Heritage Commission
City of Long Beach
411 West Ocean Boulevard
Long Beach, California 90802

RE: Agenda Item 19-038CH: 29 Kennebec Avenue in the Bluff Park Historic District: Request for a Certificate of Appropriateness to Construct a Two-Story, Three-Unit Residential Development

Dear Commission Chair Roosevelt, Vice Chair Irvine, and Members Burks, Hunter, McGuan, Ramos and Smith:

Presently before the City of Long Beach Cultural Heritage Commission (CHC) is a proposal to build a multi-family dwelling at 29 Kennebec in the Bluff Park Historic District. The site originally had a 1912-1913 prairie-style, stately home but has for decades been an empty lot. The applicant, Mr. Ramin Favakehi, is requesting relief from a 25' special setback established along E. 1st Street, between Junipero and Loma Avenues, to construct his project.

The Bluff Park Neighborhood Association (BPNA) has as its mission to protect the integrity of the Bluff Park Historic District. We understand this is a unique property within our district and recognize that the current zoning and mix of types and density of residential buildings on the block of E. 1st Street between Kennebec Avenue and Junipero Avenue are different from most of the rest of the historic district to the east. However, there are historic buildings along and near that block deserving protection, and we are concerned with changes in setbacks that could set a precedent, negatively impact our neighborhood and potentially change the character of our historic district.

We appreciate, value and place great emphasis on the *Bluff Park Historic District Ordinance* and the *Bluff Park Historic District Design Guidelines*.¹ We have a few "asks" for CHC Hearing, including a pressing issue that the existing buildings' setbacks currently along the E. 1st Street block of this development warrant a deeper setback than is being proposed.

EXISTING SETBACKS ON THAT SPECIFIC BLOCK ALONG E. 1ST STREET

The buildings' setbacks along E. 1st Street, even along the block being discussed here located between Kennebec and Junipero Avenues, are generous and are larger than what is being proposed by this development at 29 Kennebec Avenue.

The current plans show the development being set closer to the street than the adjacent historic-appearing residential building to its west located at 2222 E. 1st Street. Additionally, eight (8) of the nine (9) other buildings on both sides of E. 1st Street along that block and to the west have setbacks that are at least as deep as – and in nearly all cases are even deeper than – 2222 E. 1st Street. The only exception is a small home on the far west corner, located at 2112 E. 1st Street, which has no setback; however, architecturally 2112 E. 1st Street seems that it might have originally been the back house or garage of 42-44 Junipero Avenue and was later assigned an address on E. 1st Street. (Admittedly, we have no evidence of this, but visually it seems feasible.)

THE BPNA'S REQUEST FOR THE PROJECT'S SETBACK ALONG E. 1ST STREET

The BPNA is requesting that the 29 Kennebec Ave development have a setback along E. 1st Street of at least 16' 11", rather than 15' as is proposed and shown in the current drawings. A setback of 16' 11" would be consistent with that of the shortest setback of the existing buildings on both sides of the street on that particular block and to the west.

It is notable that the 15' setback as drawn on the plans does not take into consideration the façade build-outs around the doors. Taking the façade into consideration, the development's proposed setback is actually significantly less than 15'. The adjacent building at 2222 E. 1st St also has façade build-outs for a front-facing window and door, and it is unclear to us if the designated 16'11" includes or excludes those façade features which might warrant consideration in its setback measurement. However, we recognize the pleasing aesthetic of the doors' surrounds having a different façade depth. We believe an appropriate compromise is to ask that the development's setback be at 16'11" while allowing for the door surrounds to come a little more forward of that.

While the proposed 15' setback might not be readily noticed by most passersby as being different from its surrounding buildings because of, for example, the ample amount of open space, we as residents and in the BPNA are concerned for how future developments may come to view such a permission by the CHC as chipping away at setbacks. Such an action might inadvertently lead to a kind of "slippery slope" for future developments along that and other blocks in our neighborhood.

A setback of 16'11" from the property line along E. 1st Street would be the minimum that would be consistent with existing residences neighboring 29 Kennebec directly to the west, would be more in keeping with the language of the *Bluff Park Historic District Design Guidelines*,¹ and would still provide a seemingly reasonable compromise.

SUMMARY OF THE BPNA'S "ASKS"

The BPNA has the following "asks" of the Cultural Heritage Commission in its consideration of these plans:

1. As explained for the reasons above, the **setback** from the property line along E. 1st St should be no less than 16'11", which is shown as the setback of 2222 E. 1st St, the adjacent multi-unit residential historic building to the west of the proposed development.
2. Any exemption made to the 25' **special setback** requirement in order to accommodate this development should be as limited as possible, preferably restricted only to the property located at 29 Kennebec Ave.
3. Commissioners who are in decision-making roles and who have financial arrangements or relationships with the project's architectural firm, lobbying firm and/or applicant should be recused and leave the room during the CHC discussions and voting on this development to mitigate any real or perceived **conflicts of interest**.
4. Support the City's Planning Staff in its recommendation for **vehicular access** from along Kennebec Ave, not from along E. 1st St.
5. Support the City's Planning Staff in its recommendation to eliminate the proposed **low walls** flanking each of the pedestrian walkways to maintain the open front yard design characteristic of our neighborhood.
6. Support the City's Planning Staff in its recommendation to develop and present a more unified and appropriate design concept for the development's **windows**. The BPNA should be included in the discussion of those plans for the windows.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE APPLICANT

Although the BPNA and interested residents in the neighborhood had strongly suggested and would have preferred the prairie-style, single-family home to have been reconstructed in a manner consistent with current historic preservation standards and guidelines, the BPNA recognizes that the development is considered in-fill within our historic district and, as such, supports the applicant, Mr. Favakehi, in pursuit of his design.

Furthermore, we greatly appreciate his consistent and repeated engagement and collegiality in meeting with our association and its interested residents since we were first informed of the project by 3rd District Councilwoman Suzie Price more than 14 months ago. As an association and neighborhood we have had significant and valuable opportunity for input into the development.

The current development plans were made known to us only 2 weeks ago concurrent with the public noticing about this CHC Hearing by the City's Planning Department. This provided us little time to address and make appeals about the project's currently proposed setback along E. 1st Street, especially in relation to the existing surrounding setback conditions of that block and to the west – thus, our appeal to the CHC with this letter.

ASSOCIATION MISSION AND PURPOSE

The Bluff Park Neighborhood Association Board of Directors represents the collective voice of those who live, own and rent in the Bluff Park Historic District, which is generally bounded by E. Ocean Boulevard to E. Broadway and by Junipero Avenue to Loma Avenue. The BPNA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit entity with a mission of historic preservation and cohesion. Celebrating 47 years as an organization and 37 years of designation as the city's second historic district, the BPNA's purpose is to foster a sense of unity, collaboration, community service and goodwill for all of the city; to protect, preserve, safeguard and beautify the Bluff Park Historic District; and to support its neighborhood residents and their environment.

The BPNA Board appreciates the various stakeholders and decision-makers in their desire to better our community, to value historic and residential neighborhoods, and to build strong and respectful collaborations and relationships.

Thank you very much for the consideration given to this letter and our "asks" of the CHC during your hearing today.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Mallin
President



Megan O. Barry
Vice President of Historic Preservation

cc: Gina Casillas, Planner, Long Beach Development Services Planning Bureau
Alex Cherin, Partner, Englander Knabe & Allen
Patricia Diefenderfer, Advance Planning Officer, Long Beach Development Services Planning Bureau
Ramin Favakehi, Property Owner and Developer, 29 Kennebec Ave; President, Emerson Construction, Inc.
Christopher Koontz, Planning Manager, Long Beach Development Services Planning Bureau
Alejandro Plascencia, Historic Preservation Planner, Long Beach Development Services Planning Bureau
Suzie Price, Councilwoman, 3rd District City of Long Beach

¹The *Bluff Park Historic District Design Guidelines* say, with the accompanying illustration below on page 3 showing a dotted line of consistent setbacks, "Any change to the setback from the street on the primary elevation could cause a disruption in the visual continuity of the district or the historic relationship of a building with its site, and is not permitted."

On page 34, the *Design Guidelines* say, "New construction should be generally compatible with the existing buildings in size, scale, setback, height, massing, design, materials and architectural style to protect the overall character of the historic district.... Property owners planning new construction should... anticipate conforming to the prevailing height and setback in the district, especially that of contributing properties immediately adjacent to the proposed new construction."

Note: In the illustration below from page 3 of the *Design Guidelines*, the 2nd building from the left shows how the setback would take into consideration the façade build-outs surrounding the doors. The illustration also demonstrates the important consistency of setbacks and the line of sight.

