



January 6, 2021

City of Pasadena
Hearing Officer Paul Novak
Attn: Tess Molinar
George Ellery Hale Bldg.
175 N. Garfield Avenue
Hearing Room #120

Re: Hillside Development Permit #6837 – 801 S. San Rafael Ave.

Dear Mr. Novak:

Pasadena Heritage has been following this project for close to a year, and we ask you to reject this Hillside Development Permit due to inappropriate site planning on what is an eligible historic resource. In response to an initial project at the site, which allowed a large garage in front of the house, removed a significant portion of the interior as well as secondary façades, Pasadena Heritage was notified by members, became alarmed, and prepared and submitted a local landmark nomination for the house. The nomination details why it qualifies as an eligible landmark under Criterion B: "It is associated with the lives of persons who are significant in the history of the region, state or nation."

The house is most notably the former residence of John Van De Kamp who lived there from 1987 until his death in 2017. The house was his primary residence when he served as the Attorney General of California, ran for Governor of California in 1990, and served as the President of the State Bar of California as well as where he served as an important civic leader in Pasadena. John Van de Kamp's many contributions to California and to Southern California are widely known and were recently recognized by the City of Pasadena when it renamed the La Loma Bridge in his honor.

When initial work on this house was approved in early 2020, and after we filed our nomination, we were assured by the current owners and by City Staff that the approved work was in the best interest of the house, allowed under current code, and would not be detrimental to the historic resource. We subsequently saw that the entire interior of the house has been gutted, the large garage was completed in the front yard, and virtually all the exterior cladding of the house except the front facade was removed. Changes were even approved to the original front facade, and, it appears, that work deviated from what was approved in several instances. Furthermore, changes and additions to the project have effectively "piecemealed" the permitting process and avoided tripping public hearings. This process thus prevented the public from having an opportunity to review the project or raise questions or objections in a public forum. The series of staff-level decisions that approved the project at various stages were not available for review or comment by the public.

Had the current owners filed one complete project proposal initially, a Hillside Development Permit would not only have considered the accessory structures now proposed, but also the changes to the main residence and the garage addition. If all of those changes appeared at one hearing, would they be approved? Would not there have been the opportunity to adjust and refine the project and

consider alternatives that could have better complemented the site and the neighborhood and better preserved the original character-defining features of the house?

We believe that the siting of the structures planned or already built do not improve the setting, and neighbors see them as detrimental. Each accessory structure, including the garage, could have been better integrated with the house. Instead, they are pushed to the legal limits of the property line. The home office, complete with a full bathroom and counter space, appears intended to become an ADU. For what other reason would a backyard office need a full bathroom with a bathtub? This ADU is sited only 6' away from the "home gym" structure. Is the intention really to combine them into a two-bedroom, one-and-a-half bathroom apartment? If that is the intent, it should be clearly identified now.

Despite the damage that has been done to this property, we still believe it is an eligible historic resource, and any project approved should be respectful of the historic nature of the property. The Staff Report still makes clear that the front façade remains intact and is clearly visible from the street, despite a poorly sited garage. Our landmark nomination remains on hold for the time being, given the difficulty obtaining information about the evolving project, its unknown ultimate outcome, and the fact that the owners have said they will not support landmark recognition for the house. Nonetheless, the house can still convey its significance as John Van de Kamp's house and be considered an eligible historic resource. For these reasons, we ask you to reject the HDP, recognize the house as an eligible historic resource, and ask the applicant to return with a more contextual site plan. We also urge you to consider the home office an ADU or deny the full bath and kitchen components which are unnecessary for an office use. Finally, we believe that one Condition of Approval for any project at this site should be a plaque recognizing the house as the John Van de Kamp residence.

We thank you for considering our views on this project. We wish it had come to you sooner so that the public could have weighed in at earlier stages before so much historic fabric was destroyed.

Sincerely,



Susan N. Mossman
Executive Director



Andrew Salimian
Preservation Director

CC: Jennifer Driver, Planner