



## PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

### STAFF REPORT

**DATE:** APRIL 6, 2021

**TO:** HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

**FROM:** DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

**SUBJECT:** CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS – FRONT PORCH ALTERATIONS AND NEW FRONT AND SIDE YARD FENCES AND GATES AT 1535 OAKDALE STREET (ROSE VILLA-OAKDALE LANDMARK DISTRICT)

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#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Find that the proposed project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15301 and 15303, Class 1 and Class 3, pertaining to existing facilities such as the existing structure and to new construction or conversion of small structures such as the proposed fences; and there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class and, therefore, there are no unusual circumstances.
2. Find that no protected native, specimen, or landmark trees under the tree protection ordinance (Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Ch.8.52), will be removed.
3. Find that the project, as conditioned, will comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings and the Design Guidelines for Historic Districts; and
4. Approve the application for Certificate of Appropriateness as illustrated in Attachment A, subject to the following conditions:

#### **Conditions:**

1. The porch cheek walls shall be reduced in height by no more than eight inches, and repaired to match the existing finish. All other existing front porch elements including the posts, concrete steps and deck flooring shall be retained and preserved, or replaced in-kind.
2. The lattice elements of the front yard fence shall consist of cross lap joints to minimize the overall depth/thickness of the fence and convey a more transparent/light appearance.

3. The proposed easterly side yard fence (W-4) shall be revised to reduce the number of vertical pickets and to reduce the overall height to the minimum required for pool safety (5 feet).
4. The wooden fences shall be painted, stained, or covered with a clear protective coating to protect them against the elements to maximize their longevity.
5. The project shall be subject to final site inspection and sign-off by staff of the Design & Historic Preservation section to ensure that the work plan undertaken, as described above, is as indicated and specified in the decision letter and that all work is performed consistent with the approved plans and the Guidelines for Historic Districts.

### **BACKGROUND:**

This two-story English Cottage Revival house was constructed in 1923 and is a contributing resource to the Rose Villa-Oakdale Landmark District. Character-defining features of this house include a high-pitched cross-gable roof, a covered porch off centered from the primary elevation consisting of low walls and wooden posts supporting the roof overhang. Other features include stucco-clad walls, a large projecting bay on the east side of the house, wooden windows with divided lights, and a chimney along the primary elevation, within the front porch area projecting significantly above the roofline.

The house was previously altered. The applicant has provided photographic evidence showing the house as it was originally constructed in 1923, which shows the porch originally had a more elaborate entry way constructed in brick with a cast stone entry surround and cornice and that the house had striped awnings, clipped gables, and a wooden louvered gable vent on the street facing gable. A two-story addition and façade remodel, including simplification of the roofline and the entry porch, was built in 1935, within the period of significance of the District. The current appearance of the house is consistent with the photographic evidence from 1935, taken shortly after the second floor addition was constructed. Further, approximately the top twelve feet of the chimney was rebuilt in 1988, and the roof was replaced in 1953, 1998, and 2014. Other previous alterations include the construction of a patio cover behind the projecting bay at the easterly side of the house in 1992, which was later replaced with a new trellis in 2015. The two-story rear portion of the house was partially demolished and replaced with a larger two-story addition and some of the windows were altered in 2015. The gate opening within the side yard wall which extends from the side of the house to the easterly property line was also previously altered.

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

The proposed project consists of two major components: front porch alterations and front and side yard perimeter fencing. Each project component is described in greater detail below:

#### Front Porch Alterations:

The applicant proposes to significantly alter the front porch. The height of the stucco-clad low walls (described as porch cheek walls in the submittal) is proposed to be reduced in height by approximately half, from 28 to 14 inches, the single square porch posts are

proposed to be replaced with paired wooden square posts with decorative supporting corbels, and the concrete porch deck with a new concrete finish, and the front steps are proposed to be removed and reconfigured. The first and second porch steps from the walkway would be approximately two feet wider than the existing design and their edges would be chamfered at a 45-degree angle. The step treads are proposed to have a concrete finish and the risers would be stuccoed to match the exterior walls of the house.

#### Low Retaining Wall and Fencing:

The applicant proposes to remove a metal wire fence located in the front yard along the westerly property line and install a new front yard retaining wall, a wooden fence, and a second metal fence in front of the easterly projecting bay. The proposed retaining wall would be 9 inches tall, and would be set back 5.5 feet from the front property line and measure approximately 80 feet in length spanning from the east property line and terminating approximately 5 feet away from the edge of the driveway. Two smaller sections of retaining wall would also extend from the easterly and westerly ends of the retaining wall toward the interior of the lot, each measuring approximately 18 and 10 feet in length respectively. Due to the grade difference between the sidewalk and the proposed retaining wall, the overall height of the proposed retaining wall would range from 13 to 18 inches above the sidewalk. The retaining wall is proposed to be constructed with concrete masonry unit (CMU) blocks covered with stucco that would match the texture and color of the house. The landscaped area between the front property line and the proposed retaining wall would be graded and leveled with the sidewalk and planted with shrubs.

The proposed wooden fence would be installed on the existing natural grade, recessed one foot beyond the proposed retaining wall and maintain a similar footprint with the exception that the westerly portion of the fence would extend north from the retaining wall and terminate at the front façade of the house. The overall height of the proposed front yard fence is 2'-8" and it would consist of a square lattice open design, square wood posts, and articulated caps with spherical finials on the posts supporting the walkway gates. Two gates are proposed to be incorporated to the fence design: one gate would be installed on the south (street-facing) elevation and the second gate on the westerly elevation along the driveway.

The project also proposes the demolition and replacement of the existing (easterly) side yard solid garden wall between the house and the east property line. A new wrought iron, 5'-8" tall fence with an overall length of 36 feet would extend from the easterly property line and connect at the southeast portion of the house. The fence would be recessed two feet from the westerly portion of primary façade of the house (front yard setback area) and the fixed portions of the fence are proposed to match the open design of an existing wrought iron driveway gate located at the westerly side of the house. Lastly, a four-foot tall solid wooden fence is proposed to be installed on the westerly side of the house to serve as a trash enclosure. The fence would be significantly recessed from the primary elevation of the house and consist of an L-shaped footprint. The short fence section is proposed to extend approximately 4.5 feet from the westerly wall of the house and the long portion would measure nine feet.

The plans also include details for other site improvements such as the removal and replacement of a non-publicly visible patio cover at rear of property and new

landscaping/hardscape elements throughout the site. However, these landscaping/hardscape improvements and alterations to the structure are not publicly visible and therefore are not part of this review.

### **ANALYSIS:**

Pursuant to PMC Section 17.62.090, the proposed alterations to the front porch and the construction of front yard fences and retaining walls in a historic or landmark district are considered a “major project” and require a Certificate of Appropriateness, with the Historic Preservation Commission serving as the review authority at a noticed public hearing. A Certificate of Appropriateness is required when exterior alterations to a contributing property within a landmark district are publicly visible; and for front-yard fences within a designated landmark district regardless of the property’s status as a contributing or non-contributing resource to the district.

According to PMC Section 17.62.090 E.3.b, approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness shall be based on the following finding:

*If a project is an alteration or new construction, the project complies with the Secretary's Standards or adopted guidelines based on the Secretary's Standards.*

The project was reviewed using the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and the Design Guidelines for Historic Districts, which are based on the Secretary’s Standards. The applicable standards and guidelines include:

### **Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation**

- Standard 9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
- Standard 10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

### **Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Restoration**

- Standard 7. Replacement of missing features from the restoration period will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence. A false sense of history will not be created by adding conjectural features, features from other properties, or by combining features that never existed together historically.

### **Design Guidelines for Historic Districts:**

- Policy: “Original architectural details should be preserved in place whenever feasible.”
- 5.1: “Avoid removing or altering any significant architectural detail. Porches, turned columns, brackets, exposed rafter tails and jigsaw ornaments, if

historic, are examples of architectural features that should not be removed or altered.”

5.12: “Avoid adding ornamentation or other decorative elements, unless thorough research indicates that the building once had them.”

Policy: “Maintain a porch and its character-defining features.”

7.1: “Maintain an historic porch and its detailing. Do not remove original details from a porch. These include the porch posts, balustrade and any decorative brackets that may exist. Maintain the existing location, shape, details, and posts of the porch.”

Policy: “A fence should be in character with those used traditionally and relate to the principal structure on a lot. When used historically, fences were typically wood picket or wrought iron.”

10.6 “Where no fence exists keeping the yard open may be the best approach for a front yard.”

10.7: “Where a new fence is needed, it should be similar in character with those seen historically. A fence that defines a front yard or a side yard on a corner lot is usually low to the ground and “transparent” in nature. Traditionally fences were less than the permitted four feet. Therefore, consider a fence that is three feet in height. New fence design and materials that are similar to those used historically are appropriate. The design and materials of a new fence should be compatible with the character of the house and neighborhood.”

10.8: “A combination of fencing and screening vegetation may be appropriate. Chain link, concrete block, un-faced concrete, plastic, fiberglass, plywood and mesh ‘construction fences’ are inappropriate. Cast metal ornamentation and carriage lamps are inappropriate. A wood fence should be painted or stained.”

10.12 “For a new retaining wall, use materials similar to those seen historically. Natural rock or stone is recommended. A new retaining wall should be compatible in design and materials to the house and the district. Un-faced concrete, concrete block, log and railroad ties are not appropriate. Materials for retaining walls in most cases. New retaining walls should not exceed a height of one foot above the top of the lawn surface at the back of the wall. A new retaining wall should be less than four feet in height.”

#### Porch Alterations:

The existing appearance of the porch walls, posts, and front steps are consistent with the 1935 remodel of the house and as such are considered character-defining features that should be preserved. The proposed alterations to the porch posts and corbels would partially restore some aspects of the original 1923 design (decorative corbels and paired

porch posts), but inappropriately incorporate them into the 1935 design, creating a hybrid configuration that never existed. Remodeling the porch to restore some, but not all, of the original 1923 design is a partial restoration, which is inconsistent with the above referenced Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Restoration. Further, absent the photographic evidence of the 1923 design, the proposed alterations to incorporate paired porch posts, corbels, and wider decorative steps and a tiled landing would also be inconsistent with the above referenced Standards for Rehabilitation and Design Guidelines for Historic District, as conjectural alterations, such as the addition of ornamentation or other decorative elements, which is discouraged, unless thorough research indicates that the building once had them.

However, the property owners have explained that the existing height of the porch low walls, coupled with the grade difference from the porch to the sidewalk, makes it difficult to sit in a chair on the porch and maintain full visibility of the yard and sidewalk, which the owners have expressed is important to their enjoyment and use of the property. Rehabilitation is defined as the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values. The proposed reduction in height of porch low wall from 28 inches to 14 inches is intended to rehabilitate this space to be more functional for the owners. However, the overall reduction of the height by half would not appropriately preserve the general proportions and appearance of the porch. Therefore, staff recommends a condition of approval that the reduction in height of the low walls be no more than eight inches to better preserve the general proportions of the porch, and that all other aspects of the proposed porch remodel be disapproved based on the analysis above.

#### Low Retaining Wall and Fencing:

The proposed retaining wall and grading serve a purpose, which is to provide for level, usable front yard, and to retain earth from spilling over the sidewalk. The proposed configuration, with a large 5'6" landscaped setback from the sidewalk to the retaining wall, acknowledges and is sensitive to the surrounding context, which, with the exception of a few properties having retaining walls that adjoin the sidewalk, predominantly consists of open yards with landscapes gently sloping down to the sidewalk grade, with no retaining walls along the northerly and southerly blockfaces of Oakdale Street between Hill Avenue and Sierra Bonita Avenue. The large landscaped setback enables the overall height of the retaining wall to be significantly lower than if built closer to the sidewalk, and provides for a large area of plantings, which will further screen the low retaining wall. Although the Design Guidelines for Historic Districts specify that maintaining open yards may be the best approach where no fence exists, the applicant has demonstrated that the proposed retaining wall and fencing would serve a functional purpose.

The Rose Villa-Oakdale Landmark District features a variety of different fencing, including solid wooden fences, block walls, wooden picket fences, and metal fences with pointed pickets. The proposed metal and wood fencing materials are consistent with the materials found elsewhere in the district. The proposed fence heights and setbacks also comply with the applicable development standards in the Zoning Code. Therefore, the design, height, and location of the proposed front and side yard fences would not detrimentally affect any of the significant character defining features of the property and would be compatible with the architectural style of the house and neighborhood. However, staff recommends a condition of approval requiring the lattice elements of the front yard fence and gates to consist of cross lap joints to minimize its overall depth/thickness and convey a more transparent/light appearance as recommended in the applicable design guidelines. Staff also recommends a fourth condition of approval to require staining, painting, or covering the wooden fence with

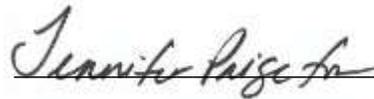
a protective coating to maximize its longevity.

The proposed easterly metal side yard fence (called out as W-4 in the plans) is in a location that will partially obscure the easterly projecting bay of the house, which is a significant character-defining feature. Although it has an open design, it would still obscure visibility of this important character-defining feature, as shown in detail F on sheet L1.51. Therefore staff recommends a condition of approval that the design be revised to reduce the number of vertical pickets and to reduce the height to the minimum required for pool safety (5 feet) to maintain visibility of the one-story projecting bay.

**CONCLUSION:**

Upon implementation of the recommended conditions of approval, the existing front porch and its character-defining features would be preserved and remain intact. In addition, the proposed front/side yard fences would be consistent with the applicable design guidelines, be appropriate designs for the house, and compatible new features in the Landmark District. The recommended conditions of approval would ensure that the proposed fence design achieves a greater degree of compatibility with other fences and the character of the Landmark District.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Attachments:

- A. Plans
- B. Existing Site & Context Photographs
- C. Historical Photographs (1923 & 1935)