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Architectural Review Board

Staff Report

Agenda Date: March 5, 2009

To: Architectural Review Board

From: Russ Reich, Senior Planner **Department: Planning and
Community Environment**

Subject: **639 Homer Avenue [08PLN-00384]:** Request by David Solnick on behalf of Farzad Ghafari and Golgoun Habibi for Preliminary Architectural Review of a proposed three unit town home development at 639 Homer Avenue.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Architectural Review Board (ARB) conduct a preliminary review of the proposed project and provide comment on the proposed design to staff and the applicant. No formal action may be taken at a preliminary review; comments made at a preliminary review are not binding on the City or the applicant.

SUMMARY

Site Information

The project is located on the north/west side of Homer Avenue, five parcels west of Middlefield Road. The site is 10,000 square feet and is currently occupied by a two story multi-unit residential building. To the right and left of the site are parcels with two residential buildings with carports between. A project to the right at 653 Homer was recently approved by the ARB for three detached residential units. The three Craftsman style units will each be two stories tall. To the rear is a two story residential apartment building. The neighborhood is an eclectic mix of architectural styles as well as building uses. Multifamily residential predominates with some single family and dental office uses mixed in. The site is zoned Multifamily Residential with an allowable density of 30 units per acre (RM-30).

Project Description

The applicant has proposed to demolish to existing apartment building and construct three townhome units. The forward unit would be detached and the middle and rear units would be attached to each other at the ground floor only.

Each unit would be two stories and have approximately 2,000 square feet of floor area. Two of the units would have one covered, attached parking space, and one open, uncovered parking space, while the middle unit would have an attached two car garage. The driveway access is proposed along the left side property line and private yard spaces are proposed along the right side of the property and at the rear. The proposed homes are of a modern design with a combination of stucco and wood finishes. The homes would have a combination of flat and sloping roofs with clerestory windows. The applicant has provided a project description included as Attachment B.

DISCUSSION

Privacy

A number of second floor windows are proposed that may impact privacy of the adjacent residences. The applicant has stated that the window placement and location of obscure glass will be customized to maximize privacy. Additional contextual information will be needed for the formal ARB review to assess possible impacts.

Parking

The access to the three covered parking spaces at the rear of the lot appears to be very tight. This will be given additional attention at the formal ARB submittal. Solutions such as wider garage openings may be considered.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

No environmental review is required for this Preliminary Review application, as it is not considered a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

ATTACHMENTS

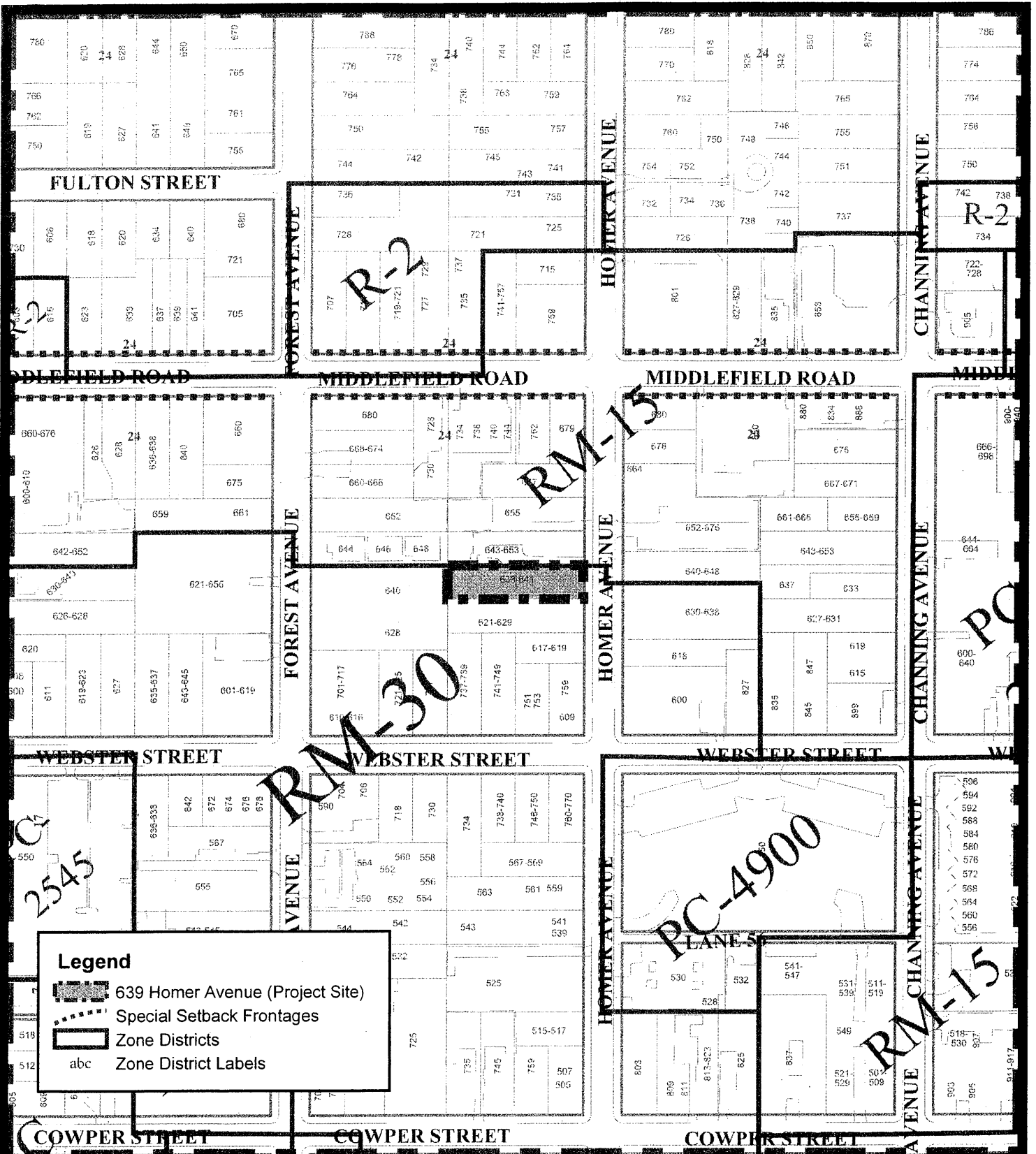
Attachment A: Project Location Map
Attachment B: Applicant's project description
Attachment C: Preliminary Development Plans (Board Members Only)

COURTESY COPIES

Farzad Ghafari and Golhoun Habibi, 877 Highlands Circle, Los Altos, CA 94024

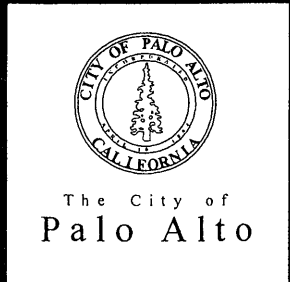
Prepared By: Russ Reich, Senior Planner 

Manager Review: Amy French, Manager of Current Planning



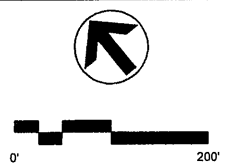
Legend

- 639 Homer Avenue (Project Site)
- Special Setback Frontages
- Zone Districts
- Zone District Labels



639 Homer Avenue
Project Area Map
with
Zoning Districts

This map is a product of the
City of Palo Alto GIS



639 HOMER AVENUE

Project Description and Design Intent

The site is a 10,000 sf (50' x 200') parcel zoned RM-30 on Homer Avenue in Downtown South, near many small developments zoned for multi-family use, both RM-15 and RM-30. A new 3-home project has recently been approved on the RM-15 parcel to the right.

Our project comprises 3 dwelling units averaging 2000 sf each. The house fronting the street is single-family detached, while the two homes in the rear are attached at their garages to form a duplex. Two of the homes have single-car garages, even though two-car garages are allowed without reduction of the living space. These decisions allowed us to provide ample outdoor living areas that far exceed the requirements.

Within a zoning envelope that was highly constrained, particularly on the RM-15 side, the massing is articulated to bring a scale that is suited to moderate-size residences. The greater setback afforded by the driveway serves to provide extra breathing room from the neighbors, especially near the larger apartments on the left. Window placement and the location of obscured glass will be carefully customized to maximize privacy for residents and neighbors alike.

The units will have slab-on-grade foundations containing hydronic heat, by nature a very efficient heating (and passive cooling) system because of the substantial thermal mass and contact with the earth. All units will have whole-house fans and no air-conditioning. South-facing clerestory windows take advantage of time-honored passive solar techniques.

Architectural forms and details are intended to be clear and unpretentious. Exterior finishes contrast stucco with natural wood, either redwood or cedar. Windows, some fixed glass and some operable, are fitted between substantial wood jambs and held with wood stops. There is no casing. Windows generally extend to the ceiling (with no headers) to maximize light without sacrificing privacy, so essential to a site such as this. Garages doors are finished with matching wood siding.

Our intent is that the project feels at home in a modern, small urban context.