

July 14, 2004

**Honorable Chairman and Members of the  
Hermosa Beach Planning Commission**

**Regular Meeting of  
July 20, 2004**

SUBJECT: APPEAL OF DIRECTOR'S DECISION REGARDING THE GRADE USED FOR  
HEIGHT MEASUREMENT.

LOCATION: 434 LONGFELLOW AVENUE

APPLICANT: BRUCE AND NANCY HAWLEY

**Recommendation**

To direct staff as deemed appropriate by minute order, from the following alternatives:

1. Determine the property to be a regularly sloping lot and interpolate the grade from the corner points only; or
2. Determine the retaining wall along the northerly property line represent unaltered grade and interpolate from the top of wall elevations.

**Background**

The subject lot is located on the south side of Longfellow Avenue between Morningside Drive and Ingleside Drive. The lot is zoned R-1 with a height limit of 25-feet, and can be developed with one dwelling unit. The lot, like others along the south side of the eastern portion of this block, is relatively flat for the majority of the lot from where it backs on the alley, and then drops down from the top of the retaining wall (3 feet at the northwest corner of the retaining wall to 3.3 feet at the northeast property corner) along the north property line to the sidewalk below. The street profile map for Longfellow Avenue (Profile Map #2167) shows that the grades along the south side of Longfellow Avenue (for 230 feet from Ingleside Drive towards Morningside Drive) was cut significantly when the thoroughfare was originally paved. Thus, the grade at the front of the lot appears to have been cut significantly when the thoroughfare was originally paved, and the grade at the top of the retaining wall along the north property line appears to represent unaltered grade.

**Analysis**

Pursuant to the definition of building height, as set forth in Section 17.04.040 of the Zoning Ordinance, and the method of determining building height, as set forth in Section 17.46.015, the grade used for the height measurements is based on the surveyed elevations points at the property corners. The method for determining building height, however, also allows consideration of other points for lots where there is significant variation in elevations between adjacent grades at corner points, the point of measurement shall be established based on the elevation at the nearest public improvement or an alternative point within 3 horizontal feet which, based on supporting evidence, represents existing unaltered grade. In cases where the datum for height measurement is disputed, the final determination of the grade may be referred to the Planning Commission.

The applicant is requesting consideration of a cut slope situation, and is proposing alternative points at the top of the retaining wall along the north property line as the basis for measuring height rather than the northerly corner points. This will allow the construction of a proposed single-family dwelling on the flat portion of the lot. If a standard straight-line interpolation from the corner points were used, the construction of the dwelling would not be possible unless the building is lowered into the grade.

The applicant's request appears to be reasonable given the existing condition of the lot and surrounding terrain. The attached photos of the property and surroundings indicate that the grade of the lot, like others on eastern portion of the block, is relatively flat before it drops down at the front portion of the lot. This condition appears to be a cut grade condition with the top of wall elevations of the existing retaining wall at the front of the lot appearing to be the natural grade.

CONCUR:

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Scott Lunceford  
Associate Planner

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Sol Blumenfeld, Director  
Community Development Department

Attachments

1. Property Survey
2. Applicant Correspondence
3. Photos

Appeal430