

Date: 08/03/2018

To,
The City Planning Commission
City of Sunnyvale

Dear Sir/Madam,

We (Neha Gupta and Nirmal Sharma) are writing this letter to request permission to remodel/rebuild our house 1441 Norman Drive.

Our current house on 1441 Norman Dr is 1302 sq ft + 522 sq ft of additional sunroom. We have a 3 bedroom house with a small kitchen (just an extension of living room), 1 bathroom and 1 unusable car garage. There are several issues with the existing house - the plumbing is broken in the bathroom., the dishwasher and washer both back up into the kitchen sink, the doors of the garage do not work, etc. We are a family of three, with parents/friends/family visiting us almost every month. We intend to grow in this house, and certainly the house is not sufficient to take this up. The foundation is slab - so any changes in design/plumbing would result in digging up the floor and seeing how good the foundation is. Another issue is that the current house (Fig. 1) stands diagonally in the lot, it is very hard to extend it on both sides. So, after many discussions with various architects we have come to conclude that the best and most long term way to extend this house is to rebuild the house.

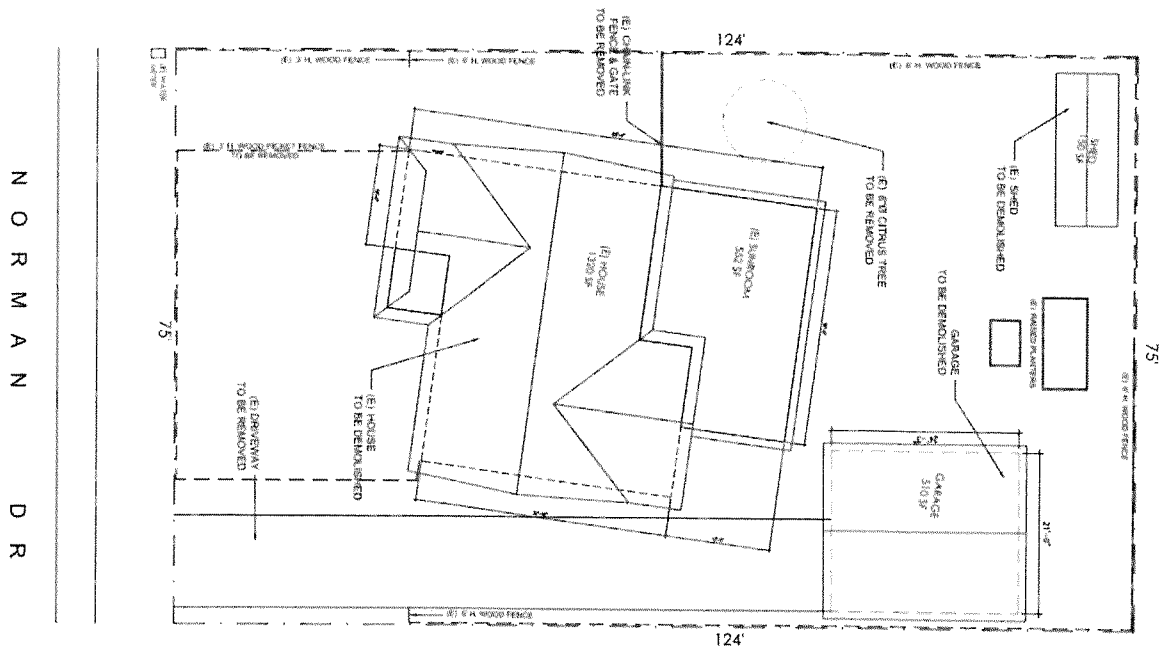


Fig 1. Existing House (1441 Norman Dr)

Also, the reason we would like to stay in this neighborhood is because we love Sunnyvale's location and neighborhood. Sunnyvale does not only have a diverse neighborhood but is also very *inclusive* to people coming from different backgrounds. When I (Neha) go out for morning walk in the Raynor Park area - we find people of different cultures and geographies interacting with each other despite language barriers. We really feel at home in Sunnyvale. Also, Raynor Park has really good schools, we would like our daughter Aarya to go to schools in the area.

The new house that we are proposing to build consists of two units - **main unit for us** and an **affordable ADU** to be available to use by family when need comes and also to provide additional housing to the city of Sunnyvale.



RENDERING OF PROPOSED NEW HOUSE

Summary of the proposed new house (**main unit**) features are -

- Total bedrooms = 5 (2 on ground floor, 3 on first floor)
- Bathrooms = 4
- Living area, dining space

- Total Square Foot includes = $1911 + 1581 = 3492$
- Total Livable (conditioned) space = $3492/9300 = 37.5\%$ FAR
- Garage for the main unit = 512
- $(3492 + 512) = 4004$ sq. ft
- FAR including garage for the main unit= 43%

Along with the main unit, we would also like to **add an affordable ADU** to the unit, this will help city deal with the lack of housing and also will help us in the near and far future with our family needs - it will serve as a housing for our parents when they grow old and also for our kids if they would like to come back and stay with us. A 2016 Pew Research study found that 15 percent of Millennials are living with their family in US and its increasing with a rate of 5% year over year in Bay Area.

The ADU is designed to span two floors in order to maximise our backyard, and also provide additional garage and back patio for the residents of the ADU. The total area of the ADU is 698 sq ft and it consists of 1 bedroom, small living room and kitchen and one & half bathroom.

Total FAR including ADU = $4004 + 250 + 698 \sim 53.2\%$.

We understand that the major concern of the city has been the FAR - we would like to explain below why the FAR seems so high and our concerns around that being the only metric for measurement -

1. When city is calculating our FAR, back porch are also being included leading to an increased FAR of $\sim 59\%$. We looked at the neighbouring city code of FAR calculation and it looks like Sunnyvale is the only city that includes porch, garage and all the covered spaces for FAR calculation. Other cities like San Jose do not include other covered spaces like porch and garage in the calculation of FAR, and Cupertino does include garage but not any covered spaces like porch etc. So with that said how can a person meet the FAR limit if everything that is covered is included in FAR for example our project FAR come down to below 45% if we include ADU with the main unit excluding porch and garage, and in that case we don't have to even go through the planning review. But since Sunnyvale adds all the non-living covered spaces, our FAR has gone up to 59% which we we think is not the right metric to measure. Porch is not a livable area, and should not count towards FAR.
2. Also, if we look at the FARs of Raynor Park there are around 13 houses that have a FAR of $> 45\%$. Many of these houses **do not include car garages and ADUs**. In fact there are 4 houses on and very near to Norman drive as well and none of them provides ADU and among the 4 houses, one is having FAR (1411 Ramon Drive) of 61%, one with 54% (1351 Norman Drive) and another one is 47%(1363 Norman drive - which does not even have garage) so based on neighborhood stats, we are very much within the neighborhood compatibility and limits and on top of it providing affordable ADU along

with dedicated car garage as well, so again I think we are unnecessary being treated unfairly. Our house has additional benefit of affordable ADU which city of Sunnyvale really wants as the city has shortage of housing but also a car garage for the residents of the ADU. The total FAR including the ADU with garage but excluding the back/front porches is 53.2% which seems reasonable to us given the additional housing we are providing.

3. We have recently seen many projects have been approved with a FAR more than 58% with the reason that the lot size was small but there is no place in the city guideline where it is mentioned based on which the city determines when to consider lot small and when to consider big. Some projects with 58% and above FAR gets approval and some does not, for example there was a proposal after our proposal on July 23rd where house at 863 San Pablo Ave. was allowed a 498-square foot second-story addition to an existing 2,465-square foot two-story single-family home resulting in 2,963 square feet (2,603 square feet living area plus 360-square foot garage) and **59% FAR** was approved. This was passed by city citing **59% FAR even without ADU** is fine for smaller lot of 6000 sq-ft but our proposal was denied even though we are providing affordable ADU with dedicated garage. Such type of ruling is unfair and creates confusion among house owners. This feels like we are being penalized for having a big lot.
4. Before we started the project, we discussed with neighbors as well and over the course of our architectural design we involved them time to time to make sure they are also align with our project and that's the reason none of the neighbor complained about our project. In fact few of the neighbors have come in support for this projects openly and they are writing a recommendation letter to city after they heard that our project got denied. So if neighbors like the design and size fits the neighborhood and planning staff approves the design then I am not sure why city has objection to it.
5. In Sunnyvale, most of the houses with ADU's do not provide dedicated car garage and that's the reason we see a lot of cars parked outside which do not provide a good view of the street. We like the city initiative of affordable ADU and we in fact went one step further by providing dedicated car garage for ADU (which increased the FAR percentage) to make sure that all the cars are being parked inside so that our house provide better street view to the neighborhood. We thought city would be supportive of this step but instead we are getting penalised by rejecting the project.
6. Also, if city is encouraging affordable ADU's to combat housing shortage then city should relax FAR's limit as well to those who are providing the ADU. Our main unit is 5BR and 4 Bath which is 37.5% of FAR only (its the other spaces like garage, porch etc. that are increasing the FAR) and we think thats the very reasonable size of a family house and if we have to build the ADU then ideally it should not be counted in FAR or the overall FAR size limit should increase because there is no way anybody can build a decent size house if he/she has to build ADU and also has to satisfy the city limit of 45% FAR limit. In last 2-3 years in Raynor park area, there were more than 10 to 15 new houses were built or remodelled and none of them had ADU and after speaking to few of those house owners, we realized that the main reason folks do not want to build an ADU is that adding an ADU to a reasonable size house increases the total FAR which leads to

planning commission approval process which indirectly lengthen the overall process of getting approvals from the city.

7. Lastly, price of house and construction both are very high in Bay Area. We already paid a whopping 1.41M \$ for the existing house, and to do new construction it is more than ~300 per sq. ft. which brings the total cost of the house around 3M \$. The marginal cost of adding an ADU is small given the large size of construction, but it will be of big help to us pay for paying back the loans. So, we strongly urge the city to support our plan for ADU and main unit as is.

We are really looking forward to remodeling our house and living in Sunnyvale for our lives! It is one of the biggest endeavor that we are taking in our lives, we would really appreciate if the city of Sunnyvale could grant us permission to build this house as proposed so that we can start with the construction as soon.

Thank you,

Sharma Family !

