

Brisbane Community Development Department
Members of the Brisbane Planning Commission
City Hall, 50 Park Place
Brisbane, CA 94005

Subject: 8 Thomas Avenue
11/14/13 Planning Commission Meeting



Dear Members of the Brisbane Planning Commission:

We are writing this letter to request that the Planning Commission find that the present design does not preserve public views of the San Bruno Mountain State and County Park (SBMSCP).

We appreciate the importance of the decision that the Planning Commission is about to make as this will set a key precedent for the interpretation of this ordinance with regards to the other eleven 5000 square foot homes proposed for Thomas Hill. Because this property is part of the Brisbane Acres, it deserves a thorough design review so that the design nestles into the hillside and becomes a welcoming entry for the Bay and Mountain setting of Brisbane.

This letter is divided into three parts. Section I describes some of the history of the present ordinance and the confusion around the previous ordinance. Section II discusses a new set of photos in which both the elevation and the GPS coordinates are included and the approximate positions of 8 and 88 Thomas are shown. These photos show that the present design does not preserve public views of the SBMSCP and the present design will obstruct much more of the

public views than the 88 Thomas design which - notably - the owners were asked by the Planning Commission on 9/24/09 to modify in order to preserve views of the SBMSCP. This design modification request was made before the present Ridgeline Ordinance was adopted. Section III is a proposal on one method of how to determine the visual impact of the house.

I would also like to apologize for the comments in my previous letter concerning how the proposed design would affect public views of the Bay (part of General Plan Policy 19). This section was copied from a letter of 2005 describing the effect of the previous design by the former owner. Because the effect of the present design is so significant at the intersection Ross and Sierra Point Road, I did not verify the other locations for this new design. I now believe that the design will not significantly affect public views of the Bay from local streets except at the Ross - Sierra Point intersection. As described in the remainder of this letter, the proposed design will however significantly affect public views of the Mountain.

Section I. Confusion around the ridgeline ordinance: the 'double ridgeline' interpretation.

The present and previous Ridgeline ordinances flow from the Policies and Programs of the 1994 General Plan - notably Policy 17 and Policy 19.

Policy 17: Preserve the ridgelines and hilltops in their open state

Program 17a: Prohibit land use changes that would result in development that would break the natural ridgeline.

Program 17b: Adopt hillside development standards that protect against ridgeline development through regulation of the siting of structures, location of access, landscape requirements and other pertinent factors.

Policy 19: In the context of respecting private property rights, make every effort to preserve and enhance public views of the Mountain and Bay.

Program 19a: Identify and map vistas and view corridors of community-wide value to be preserved and enhanced.

Program 19b: Consider amendments to the Zoning Ordinance to provide site plan review to assure that identified vistas and public view corridors remain accessible for public enjoyment. The review should evaluate building placement, height and bulk.

To capture these aspects of the General Plan, a simple one sentence ordinance was previously passed for homes in the Brisbane Acres.

BMC 17.12.040L (previous): Structures shall be located below ridgelines in a manner that will preserve public views of the San Bruno Mountain State and County Park.

Seven years ago, when 8 Thomas last came before the Planning Commission and before the present ordinance was passed, there appeared to be a "double ridgeline" interpretation of this ordinance. That is, homes should not be built on ridgelines (the 'first' ridgeline) in Brisbane Acres in such a way that blocked public views of ridgelines (the 'second' ridgeline) of the San Bruno Mountain.

This “double ridgeline” interpretation does not appear in the previous ordinance, nor does it appear Policies 17 and 19 of the General Plan. There may be some support for it in the discussion surrounding the General Plan, but this is not what the City adopted in the General Plan, in the previous Ridgeline Ordinance and in the present Ridgeline Ordinance.

The present code is much more specific about the process and the role of the Planning Commission. It is similarly direct in stating that the proposed design should preserve public views of the San Bruno Mountain State and County Park and not just the ridgelines of the SBMSCP.

BMC 17.12.040 (present) Ridgeline. Development on any site through which a ridgeline runs the planning commission shall find that the building’s placement, height, bulk and landscaping will preserve those public views of the San Bruno Mountain State and County Park as seen from the community park and from the Bay Trail along the Brisbane Lagoon and Sierra Point shorelines that are found to be of community wide value . . .

We ask the Planning Commission to interpret this ordinance as it is written and require that the present design preserve public views of the SBMSCP.

Section II. The present design is in violation of the Ridgeline Ordinance.

We agree with the concern voiced by the Planning Commission and from public commentary that photographs do not capture the complete effect of a proposed design on public views. They can however contribute significantly to the process outlined in the ordinance. Importantly, they can be used to determine one aspect of the ordinance - whether a proposed design will preserve public views of the SBMSCP. They also can be used to flesh in the outlines of a proposed design from story poles that are otherwise difficult to interpret. Photos can be used to show other proposed structures. They are useful tools, but should only be a part of the Planning Commission’s decision process.

In the Planning Commission Meeting of 10 October, it was mentioned that there was some difficulty duplicating both the photos taken by the City Community Development Department and our photos. To make this process simpler, we have taken a new set of photos and included the GPS coordinates and the elevation from which our present photos were taken. We find our photos in general agreement with those of the City. For the elevation, we have chosen what we believe is an ‘average’ viewing height of 5’ 2.4” based on an average 5” distance from eye-level to the top of the head and a male average height of 5’ 10.2” and a female average height of 5’ 4.6”. All photos were taken at this height above the western edge of the bike path along the Bay Trail near the lagoon. Figure 1 of Addendum A shows the locations of the associated photographs along the lagoon.

As with our previous photos, these were taken with a simple Canon PowerShot point-and-shoot camera with a 4x zoom. The photos do not capture the level of detail that the naked eye can see.

Where possible, we have tried to include an outline of the proposed house at 88 Thomas. In Figure 2, we describe how we incorporated 88 Thomas into the photographs. Without a complete set of story poles for this structure, this is a difficult process and we certainly could have made mistakes. We based our sketches on the three remaining story poles for 88 Thomas and the City's Planning Commission Agenda Report of 12/11/09. Two of the remaining story poles (Poles 2 and 4) allow the City's image of the East View of 88 Thomas to be scaled and placed in the photos. Where only one of the story poles is visible (Views A and B), we mimicked the size and location of the design from photos which show all Story Poles (Views C, D, E and F).

It is important to mention that the modified design of 88 Thomas was approved under the previous ordinance and does not completely preserve public views of the SBMSCP. However, it still has a smaller effect of public views than the present design for 8 Thomas.

Walking from View A to View F, the proposed design of 8 Thomas will block significant portions of the San Bruno Mountain State and County Park. Views A and B (Figures 3 and 4) show that the present design of 8 Thomas blocks views of SBMSCP near the fire trail that runs from the quarry road to the ridge. The effect of 8 Thomas will be much larger than that of the existing apartment building. Views C, D and E (Figures 5, 6 and 7) show that the design of the 8 Thomas extends significantly above the apartment building and blocks public views of the upper portion of the SBMSCP. Indeed in View E, it covers the ridgeline that is visible above the apartment building. In View F, it blocks the uppermost peak of the SBMSCP. The distance from View A to View F is greater than the distance of two football fields.

Section III. A proposal for one method to determine the impact of this design

A personal view of the visual effect of the proposed design would be an important method to weigh the information from photos and the community. The present story poles work well for photographs because it is possible to form the envelope of the house using the tops of the poles. However, they do not work well when looking at the proposed design with the naked eye. The story poles are nearly invisible from the Bay Trail and it is difficult to determine the shape of the roof line.

To use the naked eye to evaluate the proposed design, we suggest that the tops of the story poles be connected by red tape or netting. This method is used in other cities to evaluate the envelope of proposed houses. It should then be possible to determine the extent that public views are disrupted by the present design.

In this evaluation, we ask the City and Planning commission to consider that any decision made for the present home will also apply to any other house that is built along a ridgeline in the Brisbane Acres.

Conclusions

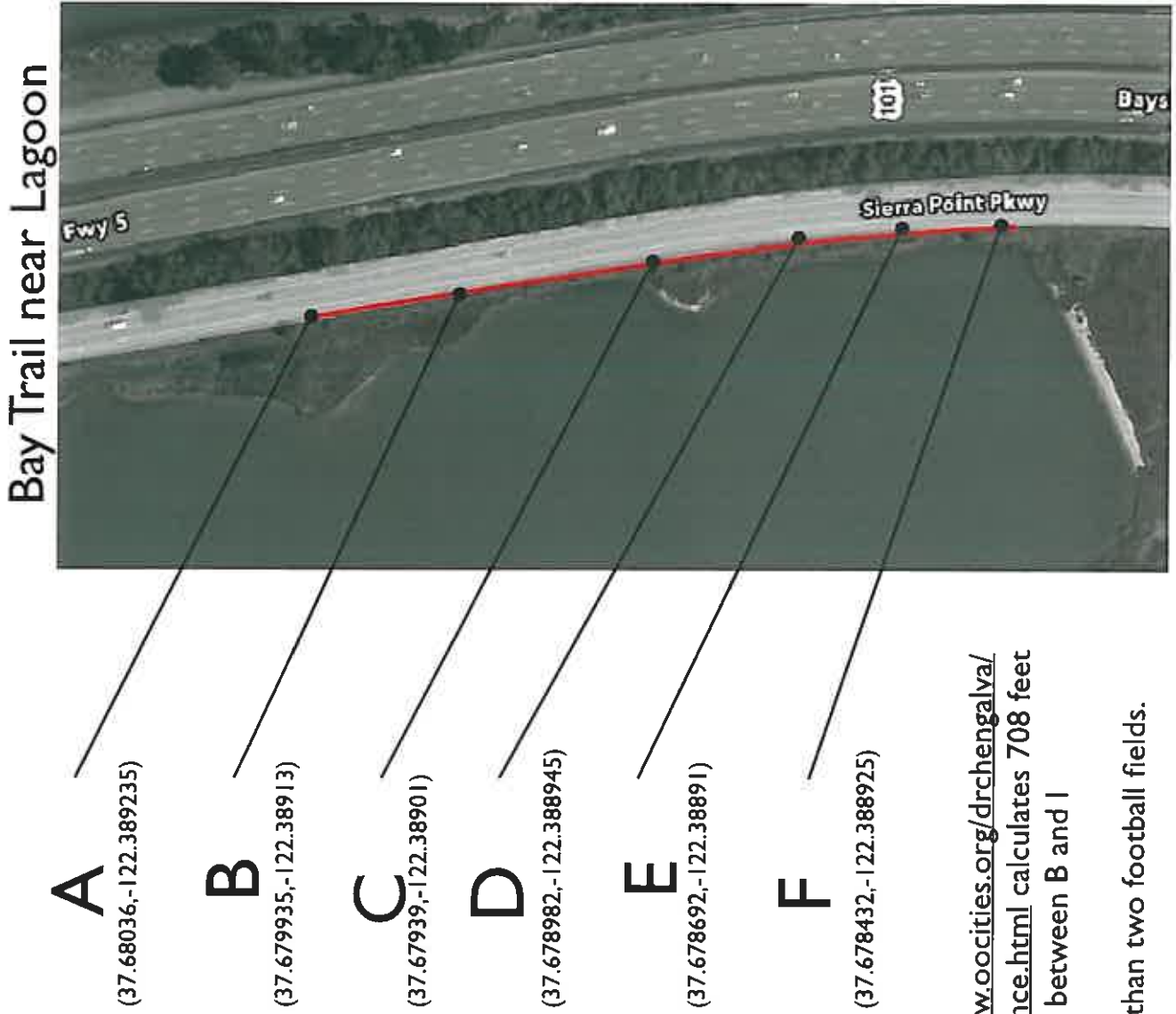
The images clearly show that the present design does not preserve views the the San Bruno Mountain State and County Park. The negative effect of the proposed house is substantially larger than the existing apartment building and it blocks public views from a large 700 ft section of the Bay Trail. We believe that an exquisite house with expansive views of the Bay can be built on this property, but the owner should design a home that agrees with the Ridgeline Ordinance and nestles into the existing hillside.

Thank you for your time in reading this request,

Yours,

Storrs Hoen and Beth Grossman

Figure 1. Map of Locations



average height of US male: 5' 10.2"
 average height of US female: 5' 4.6"
 average distance from eyes to top of head: 5"
 set camera lens height at 5' 2.4"

<http://www.oocities.org/drchengalvalGPSDistance.html> calculates 708 feet between B and I

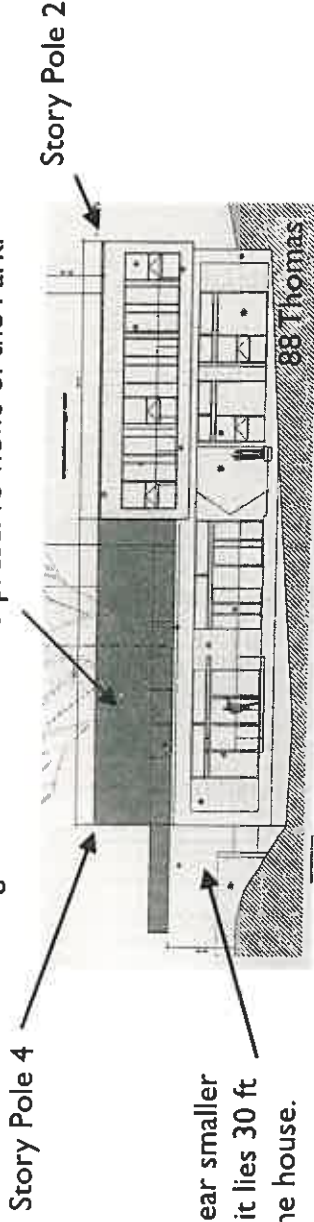
More than two football fields.

Figure 2. How we put 88 Thomas in the photos

Step A.

Use East View of 88 Thomas from City Agenda Report from 12/10/09

The original design was modified and the shaded region was removed to preserve views of the Park.



This portion will appear smaller than shown because it lies 30 ft behind East face of the house.

Step B. Locate Story Poles 2 and 4 in photo



Step C.

Scale 88 Thomas image, rough out shaded region and place according to the locations of Story Poles 2 and 4.

Possible Errors:

- Is Story Pole 2 correctly identified?
- Portion to the left of Story Pole 4 will appear smaller than shown because it is 30 ft behind East face of house



Figure 3. View A - 5' 2.4" above Bay Trail, GPS Location (37.68036,-122.389235)



Figure 4. View B - 5' 2.4" above Bay Trail, GPS Location (37.679935,-122.38913)



Figure 5. View C - 5' 2.4" above Bay Trail, GPS Location (37.67939, -122.38901)



Figure 6. View D - 5' 2.4" above Bay Trail, GPS Location (37.678982,-122.388945)



G.1.77

Figure 7. View E - 5' 2.4" above Bay Trail, GPS Location (37.678692,-122.388891)



Figure 8. View F - 5' 2.4" above Bay Trail, GPS Location (37.678432,-122.388925)

