



## Planning Commission Rebuilding Year Round

by Duncan Cook

### Planning Commission considers business use extension, new homes, tree removal appeal

by Judith Steinle

On March 26, The Planning Commission considered applications for an extension of parking lot use by a fitness studio, and for two new houses; they also heard an appeal of a tree removal permit denial.

**1190 Dell Ave.:** The owner of Move It Silicon Valley, a fitness studio, had applied to renew the five-year parking space use first approved for this business in 2014. He had also applied to increase the number of permitted parking spaces from 26 to 45, and the number of trainers in the studio from two to three. This studio is in a large building designed mainly for manufacturing purposes. The property has 142 parking spaces.

The Commission approved the extension, and the use increases.

**1374 Stevens Ct.:** The owner of this 10,000 square-foot property had applied to demolish the existing single-story house, and build a 3,636 square-foot, two-story house with attached garage, totaling 4,084 square feet. The proposed size, style, and building materials are consistent with other homes in the neighborhood.

The Commission approved this permit.

**620 Kenneth Ave.:** The owner of this 11,922 square-foot property had applied to demolish the existing single-story house, and build a 4,104 square-foot, two-story house with attached garage, totaling 4,629 square feet. The proposed house meets all standards of setbacks, and floor area ratio (square-footage relative to lot size). Concerns of privacy for neighbors had been addressed, and the style is consistent with newer homes in the neighborhood. However, the proposed house is about 1,500 square feet larger than the average two-story home in that neighborhood.

The Commission discussed the impact of a house this size in a neighborhood still mostly populated by single-story houses. Some commissioners expressed opinions that the overall mass of the structure was out of keeping with its surroundings. Others stated that the applicant had the right to build the house as proposed, since it did meet all building and neighborhood plan standards.

The Commission voted, 4 to 3, to continue this item, and requested that the owner reduce the mass of the structure, to make it more in keeping with the other homes in the area.

**31 Hardy Ave.:** The owner of this property had applied to remove a large redwood tree growing directly behind the house. The tree has a split in the trunk. The owner had stated that its roots were growing into the sewer line, causing frequent sewage backups into the bathroom. The tree is also in the way of a planned expansion of this three-bed, one-bath house.

There are five criteria under which a tree can be removed. The owner had invoked three of them. They stated that the tree was deemed healthy, but the split trunk made them fearful of part of the tree falling. They stated that the roots have had to be removed from the sewer frequently, which is an interference with utilities. And they stated that the tree was interfering with their economic enjoyment and causing hardship, as they were unable to proceed with building their anticipated addition to the house; and the sewer backups were frequent, a health hazard, and costly to fix.

The Planning Department had denied the original application for removal, on the grounds that none of the three reasons cited was really an issue. The suggestion had been made to re-route the sewer away from the tree, and to design a second-story addition instead of increasing the first story in the direction of the tree.

The Commission discussed all three of the owner's concerns. It was pointed out that the property had been purchased with the tree on it. The Commission concluded that they needed more documentation of several things. They requested proof of the sewer condition, either by snake camera or other means. They also requested an assessment of the tree's health by a third-party arborist. With this documentation, the Commission hoped to be able to address the question of hardship properly.

The Commission voted to continue this item, to allow the owner to provide the requested documentation.

I drive past the many warehouses and business buildings along McGlincy Lane looking for the rare residential unit for the story. The tell-tale sign of the big, white Rebuilding Together van parked in the driveway indicates that I have arrived. I park and walk up amidst bustling volunteers in Rebuilding Together t-shirts and ask who is in charge. Everyone points to an empty doorway around back which is soon filled by a fresh faced man waving to me. "Hi, I'm Christian, you're here from the paper?" he asks.

Rebuilding Together is a non-profit community revitalization organization which has grown from the housing needs of others, being fulfilled by volunteer citizens. According to their website, "Homes in their community had fallen into disrepair and their neighbors could not afford to fix them on their own... The mission spread beyond the idea of providing service once a year in April to bringing together partners from all walks of life to help our neighbors year-round... Together, with our corporate and community partners, we repair homes, revitalize communities and rebuild lives. Rebuilding Together's local affiliates and nearly 100,000 volunteers complete about 10,000 rebuild projects nationwide each year."

The next big group event happens on the weekend of April 27th and sign-ups are open until April 6th so put down this paper, get on your computer and volunteer now. I will be here when you get back. \*Jeopardy Theme Music plays\*

Okay, good job! Your humble narrator is heading a crew this year and will be reporting to you from the field in the coming weeks. In the meantime, folks can get primed by signing up for the weekly volunteer Thursday program. Christian Cravens is the lead on the McGlincy job site and cheerfully fills me in on what is happening. He is employed full time by the organization as a field repair technician, helping to guide the efforts of whatever number of community helpers sign up for the safety upgrades and improvements to homes of those in need of services.

"Every Thursday, we try to get anywhere from three to fifteen volunteers depending on the project," says Cravens. On other days, he is engaged in what they call "Safe at Home," where they tackle improvements like grab bars, smoke alarms, higher toilets, and other minor modifi-



Volunteers work to make front door steps easier to navigate. Photo Credit for all photos: Duncan Cook.



The Rebuilding Together volunteer crew works as a team to improve the lives of others.



Custom built pieces are fabricated out back while others install them inside the house.

cations to dwellings which will make a tenant's unit more safe and useful. Anyone who wants to get involved should visit rebuildingtogethersv.org and take a look at the various opportunities to contribute to our local community. No need to be a contractor; absolutely anyone has a great value to contribute to this extremely well-run and rewarding effort.

In the coming weeks, I will be sharing articles from an insider's

perspective on getting involved from the first steps, and hopefully meeting some of you in the field. Every set of hands makes a difference and this is a great way for families, businesses and students to have a tangible, positive influence on the community. Mutually beneficial does not even begin to describe the possibilities of joining the team. Onward!