Site & Architecture Review of 18081 Saratoga Los Gatos Road Subdivision Proposal

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Prepared for the Monte Sereno Site & Architecture Committee

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1 Introduction

The Monte Sereno Site & Architecture Committee will review a three-lot subdivision proposal at 18081 Saratoga Los Gatos Road.

**We request that the Monte Sereno Site & Architecture Committee deny the site development permit applications!**

The subdivision includes degrading the existing neighborhood and Scenic Corridor character, harming neighbor view, privacy, and property value, destroying the natural landscape by grading the hillside flat and removing the majority of the mature trees in order to accommodate a small cul-de-sac, three pie-shaped lots, and three maximum single-story houses with attached two-car garages ranging in size from 3,549 to 3,564 sq ft with minimum setbacks.

The original home, built in 1919, was a community historical landmark. Unfortunately, the home was destroyed by fire in June 2015, so Heritage Preservation laws no longer apply, thus enabling an out-of-state/town owner/developer to try to exploit the smaller zoning than the 100 year old configuration.

The architectural designs of the houses are inexpensive tract development style rather than custom houses with unique character. The landscape plan is minimal due to the majority of hardscape and does not adequately restore the aesthetic value of the previous natural hillside now graded flat. The cheap dense tract development does not match the existing neighborhood character and irreversibly degrades the neighborhood, the community, and the Scenic Corridor.

Most egregious is the visual impact imposed on the neighbors, especially the 18050 Arlee Drive property. The maximized houses are pushed to the edges of the property with minimum setbacks and due to the flat grading, are raised from the original hillside terrain in the rear of the property. The home design and orientation create a view of Costco-like industrial bulk, 27-35 feet high, and across the entire length of the 18050 Arlee Drive property. Main windows and porches impose on privacy from their raised vantage point. To put this in prospective, the new wall of construction will be approximately five times the height of the existing fence line. The previously visible mature tree line and mountains are unacceptably obscured.

In Monte Sereno, we value preserving rural character, scenic beauty, and conforming to natural landscapes. We mandate that new development meet minimum standards of 1) preserving and enhancing existing neighborhood character, 2) minimizing visual impact, 3) adapting to the land and reflecting natural contours, 4) preserving trees, vegetation, and natural attributes, 5) and landscape and drainage should emphasize the use of native materials and be sensitive to the rural character of the area. As presented, the 18081 Saratoga Los Gatos Road subdivision proposal does not meet the high standards for new development in Monte Sereno.

**We request that the Monte Sereno Site & Architecture Committee deny the site development permit applications!**
The following sections below list in detail relevant Monte Sereno provisions and requirements, organized by Necessary Site Development Findings and highlights inconsistencies and concerns with the current proposal. The application must be denied if ALL of the requirement boxes below cannot be checked as compliant.

2 Neighborhood Character

Monte Sereno Policy:

- LU-1.2 - Require new development to complement and enhance existing neighborhood character.
- LU-1.3 - Continue to review new development proposals to ensure that they do not overwhelm their sites or their neighborhood.
- Goal 5 - Maintain existing suburban and semi-rural character in Monte Sereno.
- 3A1 - The character of the neighborhood should determine the design of the structure and the placement on the lot.
- 3B1 - Compatibility with a neighborhood character occurs when homes retain their individuality without dominating the neighborhood.
- 10.08.050 Permit Process - Whether the proposed improvement and/or use is compatible with the character of the surrounding neighborhood in which it would be located.

The neighborhood surrounding 18081 Saratoga Los Gatos Road predates Monte Sereno incorporation in 1957 and Monte Sereno’s earliest zoning map in 1961. The original home was built in 1919 and was a community historical landmark protected by Historical Preservation laws (Monte Sereno Municipal Code Chapter 12, California Environmental Quality Act), but was unfortunately destroyed by fire in June 2015. The home was approximately 3,047 sq ft on an approximately 41,499 sq ft lot. The property has retained its original rural character for over 100 years despite the smaller R-1-8 zoning.
Surrounding neighbors are custom single-family homes on rural lots that are on greater than or equal to 20,000 sq ft. The abutting neighborhood to the rear of the property transitions to custom single-family homes on greater than or equal to R-1-8 lots.

The property is located along Saratoga Los Gatos Road, which is a protected Scenic Corridor. Properties from Rose Avenue to Saratoga are custom single-family homes on rural lots that are on greater than or equal to 20,000 sq ft.
As noted by the City Planner in RE: Response to 2nd Resubmittal, 7/31/2018, “The design of the three homes does not present enough variation in design details. As presented it appears as though the three homes are like a standard tract home and not individual custom homes. You need to be more creative with the design with more architectural detail, variation in finish materials from home to home, and porch elements where possible.” As the City Staff states, the tract design quality of each subdivision lot will not enhance the neighborhood, but rather degrade the neighborhood character.

Lot-3 has a Costco-like industrial flat roof design that is not common to the neighborhood character of ranch and prairie style homes. The flat roof design was not an intentional design feature, but was made as a last-minute design change to meet Hillside and Scenic Corridor height requirements in the least expensive way. Even with the roof removed, the hillside grade was raised and the home design and orientation is visually linear, so the bulk and visual impact are still major issues (also discussed below).
Main windows and porches impose on privacy from their raised vantage point. Lot-3 industrial flat roof design does not conform to the surrounding neighborhood character.

Figure 3- Lot-3 industrial flat roof architecture is not common to the neighborhood character, is raised above the natural grade, and main windows and porch impose on privacy.

Although meeting minimum R-1-8 zoning requirements, the overall design, size, placement, and orientation of the three subdivision lots is crowded and overwhelms the site and neighborhood. The flat grading, short cul-de-sac, and multi-house compound are uncommon to the neighborhood. Smaller houses, augmented basements, tiered design, and/or application of design elements to minimize overall density and bulk could have been used to conform to existing neighborhood character, but were not. Each subdivision lot, both individually and taken as a whole, degrades the neighborhood character.

For the above reasons, the site develop plan is inconsistent with the Monte Sereno General Plan and therefore, the site development permits for each of the subdivision lots should be denied.

3 Visual Impact
Monte Sereno Policy:

- LU-2.4 - Carefully review development in areas of high scenic value.
- H-1.1 - Continue to require Site Development Permit approval for all new homes and to require project consistency with the City Design Guidelines.
- 3A2 - A building’s mass, roof form and projecting elements should be designed so as to minimize the visual impact of the building on the neighborhood. Rooftlines should be designed in ways that minimize interference with views from neighboring properties.
- 3A3 - Buildings and trees should be designed and sited so as to minimize the obstruction of key views from adjacent properties.
- 4A5 - A building’s mass, roof form and projecting elements should be designed so as to minimize the visual impact of the building on the slope. Rooftlines should be designed in ways that minimize interference with views from neighboring properties.
- 4C1 - On a sloping site, the structure should be stepped down the hill utilizing one story building elements. Avoid cantilevers and stilts over downhill slopes.
- 5A1 - Use architectural details to break up mass. The use of eaves, bay windows, small windows, varying elevations and alcoves reduce the appearance of bulk and are encouraged.
- 10.08.050 Permit Process - Whether the orientation and location of the buildings take into consideration the visual impact which could result from the proposed improvement and/or use.

The fundamental problem with the site design is that the developer is trying to build too many houses on a lot where infrastructure, such as proper easements, ingress/egress, drainage, utilities, etc. (similar to Arlee Drive), was never contemplated by the City, despite the R-1-8 designation. Adding a cul-de-sac to satisfy frontage requirements then dictates that maximum sized homes must be pushed to the lot boundaries with minimum setbacks, thus maximizing neighborhood visual impact. The lot is a hillside, which the developer chose to grade flat and introduce elevation discontinuities along the perimeter, which further exacerbates visual impact and drainage issues. Setting the density issue aside, the individual subdivision lots and house designs do not minimize visual impact, significantly invades privacy, and unacceptably interferes with views from neighboring properties.
As discussed above, Lot-3 has a Costco-like industrial flat roof design as a last minute design change to satisfy Hillside and Scenic Corridor height requirements in the least expensive way. Even with the roof removed, the hillside grade was raised and the home design and orientation is visually linear, so the bulk and visual impact are still major issues. Note that a split home was not implemented to better conform to the natural hillside, as recommended by the City Planner in, RE: Response to 2nd Resubmittal, 7/31/2018. As a result, the First-Floor foundation is 13 feet above the 18050 Arlee Drive property (approximately twice the back fence height) and the proposed house is another 14 feet, for a total elevation of 27 feet above the 18050 Arlee Drive property.

The home on Lot-2, with a total elevation of 35 feet above the 18050 Arlee Drive property, is also visible across the back property line and does not follow the design guideline to avoid cantilevers and stilts.

To put the location, length, and height of Lot 2 and Lot 3 in prospective, the new construction will extend the entire length and be approximately five times the height of the existing fence line. The result is a visual wall that obscures the mature tree line and scenic view of the mountains and imposes an unreasonable visual impact to the 18050 Arlee Drive property.

Furthermore, the main kitchen, family room, and master bedroom windows and outdoor porch impose on privacy from their raised vantage point. Note the porch for Lot 3 extends into the 30 foot setback, so is only approximately 20 feet from the fence line and 13 feet above the 18050 Arlee Drive property. The slope of the yard in the setback area is extreme and unusable due to the raised grading, so the porch will
be the primary outdoor venue for Lot 3. Both Lot 2 and Lot 3 directly overlook the 18050 Arlee Drive property from a raised vantage point and the landscape plan does not propose adequate, mature screening. Consequently, the window and porch design for Lot 2 and Lot 3 impose a severe and unreasonable impact to the privacy of the 18050 Arlee Drive property.

Figure 5 – Lot 3 flat roof and raised foundation 13 feet above Arlee Drive lot and approximately 20 feet from the fence line. Lot 2 and 3 design and orientation is visually linear, so bulk and visual impact are major issues. Porch and windows impose extreme privacy issues from their raised vantage point.
Figure 6 – Severe impact to view and privacy from 18050 Arlee Drive property. Second-floor balcony view. Note that even from second-floor, the mature tree line and mountains are obscured.
Figure 7 - Severe impact to view and privacy from 18050 Arlee Drive property. First-floor kitchen sink and kitchen table view.

Figure 8 - Severe impact to view and privacy from 18050 Arlee Drive property. First-floor family room left/right windows and seated on couch view.
In keeping with Monte Sereno requirement H-1.1: *Continue to require Site Development Permit approval for all new homes and to require project consistency with the City Design Guidelines*, it is both relevant and objective to compare the 18081 Saratoga Los Gatos Road application for Lot 2 and Lot 3 to other recent and similar applications heard by the Site & Architecture Committee and the City Council.

17618 San Benito Way, SS-17-06, Tchakerian, is a similar application.

- The applicant requests approval of a Site Development Permit to allow for the construction of a 1,124 square foot second story addition to an existing single-story home; and, a 52 square foot first floor addition, as well as an interior remodel of the existing home. The proposal also includes two rear decks at the second floor.
- The application was heard on 4/5/2017, 6/7/2017, and 9/5/2017.

The public record documents similar public concerns over the raised vantage point over the Via Sereno neighborhood, the resulting bulk of the structure, and the impact on privacy. The Site & Architecture Committee denied the application and the City Council unanimously upheld the decision.
For the above reasons, the site develop plan is inconsistent with the Monte Sereno General Plan and therefore, the site development permits for each of the subdivision lots should be denied.

4 Minimize Grading and Retention of Natural Contours

Monte Sereno Policy:

- Policy LU-2.1 - Require development to be designed to protect natural resources, preserve open spaces and natural topography.
- Policy LU-2.2 - Encourage residential uses to merge naturally with surrounding land uses through the gradual change of densities and the preservation of the natural topography.
- 4A1 - A building should be designed to be compatible with the natural slope of the land, adapting to the land and reflecting its contours, while preserving all significant, existing trees and vegetation and any other natural site attributes. It is City policy to prevent significant loss of vegetation and trees due to a construction project.
- 4A4 - Open space and landscape areas should visually blend with adjacent properties and be consistent with the neighborhood and sensitive to the rural character of the City. Buildings should be orientated so that outdoor space will visually connect between properties and extend a sense of open space, while maintaining a sense of privacy.
- 4B1 - Integrate the structures and landscaping with the surrounding environment and terrain. Retain the rural countryside feeling and openness of the City's setting. The surrounding natural environment should dominate the visual character of the site.
- 4B2 - Make the site design compatible with the terrain and blend it into the surroundings.
- 4B3 - Structures on prominent and highly visible hilltops or ridgelines should flow with the land and may be required to be one story
- 4B4 - Build with the contours of the land. This means avoiding excessive grading for yards and landscaping areas of a hillside lot.
- 4C1 - On a sloping site, the structure should be stepped down the hill utilizing one story building elements. Avoid cantilevers and stilts over downhill slopes.
- 10.08.050 Permit Process - If applicable, whether the proposed improvement and/or use will provide for minimum grading and retention of the natural contours of the land then existing in order to protect the natural slope of the lot.

The Initial Study states that the subject property slopes upward from Saratoga Los Gatos Road approximately 10 feet through the first 1/3 of the property and then begins to slope back down
approximately 20 feet towards the rear of the properties along Arlee Drive. The average slope across the whole site is approximately 13.78%.

The grading plan basically flattens the hillside, lowering the front of the property and pushing the dirt to the rear. In Monte Sereno, we value conforming to the natural contours of the land to preserve a natural look. Flattening the hillside must not be allowed. The proposed grading plan allows for the least expensive flat tract subdivision with the maximum impact to the natural hillside adjacent to the Scenic Corridor. The grading plan and site design for the subdivision lots do not adapt to the land and reflect natural contours.

Figure 10 - Natural hillside slope and mature landscape as seen from 18050 Arlee Drive (though open fence damaged in storm).
All three home designs do not adhere to Monte Sereno requirements of following the natural contours of the land. Please note in Appendix A – Project Plans, the natural grade versus the home elevations. Lot-1 is lowered by approximately 7 feet, Lot-2 is lowered by approximately 9 feet on one side and raised with stilts by 14 feet on the other, and Lot-3 is raised by 7 feet as a consequence of the flat grading. As previously noted, split home was not implemented to better conform to the natural hillside, as recommended by the City Planner in, RE: Response to 2nd Resubmittal, 7/31/2018. The grading plan and site design for the subdivision lots do not adapt to the land and reflect natural contours.
Figure 12 - Lot-1 not adapting to land and reflecting natural contours, but rather flat grading lowers the property by approximately 7 feet.

Figure 13 - Lot-2 not adapting to land and reflecting natural contours, but rather flat grading lowers the property on one side by approximately 9 feet and raises the other side with stilts by approximately 14 feet.
Figure 14 - Lot-3 not adapting to land and reflecting natural contours, but rather flat grading raises the property by approximately 7 feet.

For the above reasons, the site develop plan is inconsistent with the Monte Sereno General Plan and therefore, the site development permits for each of the subdivision lots should be denied.

5 Preserve Trees, Vegetation, Natural Attributes

Monte Sereno Policy:

- 4A1 - A building should be designed to be compatible with the natural slope of the land, adapting to the land and reflecting its contours, while preserving all significant, existing trees and vegetation and any other natural site attributes. It is City policy to prevent significant loss of vegetation and trees due to a construction project.

- 4B1 - Integrate the structures and landscaping with the surrounding environment and terrain. Retain the rural countryside feeling and openness of the City’s setting. The surrounding natural environment should dominate the visual character of the site.

- 4C2 - Plan outdoor areas and structure location so existing trees and vegetation can be saved.
10.08.050 Permit Process - If applicable, whether the proposed improvement and/or use provides for: Retention of significant trees as defined elsewhere in the Code, unless the findings required by Section 10.15.080 of the Code can be made.

10.15.030 Significant Trees Definition - Trees deemed significant for the purpose of this Chapter are those whose visual importance to the neighborhood is sufficient to justify special efforts to protect and preserve them and whose loss would be of irremediable adverse impact on the environment. Factors to be considered in determining the significance of trees are age, size, rarity and appearance. Notwithstanding the preceding, each of the following is declared to be a significant tree or trees:

- Oaks or redwood trees having a circumference greater than twenty (20) inches measured at a height of four (4) feet above ground level.
- B. Any tree having a circumference greater than twenty-five (25) inches measured at a height of four (4) feet above ground level.
- C. Any three (3) or more trees proposed to be removed from any parcel of property within a twelve (12) month period.

The Initial Study states that the proposed project includes the removal fifteen (15) trees, 5 of which are multi-trunk trees. The actual number of proposed trees to be removed in the landscape plan is seventeen (17) because trees 135 and 140 were not properly counted. The diameters of the trunks range from 5 to 29 inches with the condition of the trees ranging from poor to good.

In Appendix F – Tree Inventory and Assessment, the report recommends that if the subject property is to be developed, the total tree impact needs to be evaluated and a proper tree protection plan following the guidelines in Managing Trees during Construction, second edition, needs to be developed. No such report has been provided.
Figure 15 – Grading, dense housing construction, cul-de-sac and hardscape, and drainage infrastructure will impact the natural landscape and the majority of the mature trees.

Highlighted yellow/orange trees are good or fair condition, Circled trees are planned to be removed.
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<th>Preservation</th>
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|                                | 32       |
| Total Good, Fair, or Removed  | 26       |
| Total Good                     | 14       |

* Includes trees possibly affected by drainage infrastructure

|                                | 14       |
| Total Oaks or Redwoods Removed| 1        |

|                                | 2        |
| Total Diameter > 25” Removed   | 1        |

Figure 16 - Inventory of Good, Fair, or Removed trees. Trees 115 and 116 should be marked as Fair. Trees 123, 127, and 128 will possibly be negatively affected by drainage infrastructure.

Due to the site design, maximum size houses, and drainage infrastructure, a total of 17 to 20 trees of 46 trees will be removed, whereas Monte Sereno considers the removal of three (3) trees to be significant.
A total of 11 to 14 trees of 26 trees in good to fair condition will be removed, whereas Monte Sereno considers the removal of three (3) trees to be significant.

A total of 14 oak or redwood trees will be removed, 1 of which has a diameter greater to 20 inches, and one has a diameter equal to 20 inches, whereas Monte Sereno considers the removal of any oak or redwood trees with diameters greater 20 inches to be significant.

One tree with a diameter greater than 25 inches will be removed, whereas Monte Sereno considers the removal of any tree with a diameter greater 25 inches to be significant.

Monte Sereno has a one-for-one replacement policy of like-kind and size, but the current landscape plans, referenced in Appendix A – Project Plans, are severely lacking. It is likely that trees not marked for removal in the landscape plan will be impacted by construction or removed in a discretionary way, perhaps due to a poor designation, which will add to the already excessive 17 planned removals. There is no mention of trying to relocate large trees to other areas on the lot. Even if large plantings are used to replace existing mature trees, which none are planned, it will take 15-20 years for them to grow to 30+ feet and restore the natural landscape. The site design for the subdivision lots will irreversibly impact natural, mature hillside trees and landscape.

For the above reasons, the site develop plan is inconsistent with the Monte Sereno General Plan and therefore, the site development permits for each of the subdivision lots should be denied.

6 Landscaping and Drainage

Monte Sereno Policy:

- 5B1 - Utilize colors, which occur naturally in the landscape of the site. Darker or natural colors blend better with the surroundings.
- 6A1 - Landscape elements should augment the relationship between the building and its site.
- 6A2 - Landscaping should be designed to protect the privacy of the neighbors and home owners.
- 6A3 - Create landscape buffers between neighboring properties.
- 6B1 - Driveways and walkways should complement the home while maximizing the amount of landscaping and minimizing the amount of paving.
- 6B1C - Place roads and driveways on existing contours to minimize grading. Driveways should have a slope less than 15%.
- 6B1F - Drainage and frontage improvements should be compatible with the neighborhood and sensitive to the rural character of the City.
10.08.050 Permit Process - If applicable, whether the landscaping for the proposed improvement and/or use emphasizes the use of native materials in the area.

The landscape plan referenced in Appendix A – Project Plans, shows numerous plantings around the perimeter of the property, but these plantings are insufficient to provide adequate screening to mitigate visual impacts and privacy loss, both near- and long-term. It will take 15-20 years to grow a 30+ foot screen. The landscape plan for the subdivision lots is insufficient and does not adequately restore the rural natural environment which should dominate the visual character of the site.

The landscape plan is unrealistic and does not account for hillside slope, which was exacerbated by grading, near the back of the property. The landscape plan shows kidney shaped backyard area with surrounding plantings, when in fact; this area is quite steep and unusable space. The slope is approximately an 8 foot drop within the 30 foot setback. The landscape plan for the subdivision lots is unrealistic and unacceptable.

Figure 17 - Landscape plan insufficient to 1) screen neighbors from bulk and loss of privacy, 2) unrealistic backyard drawing due to the extreme hillside slope in the rear of the property. 17 trees marked in orange are to be removed.

The drainage plan referenced in Appendix A – Project Plans, shows extensive construction along the back of the property to collect and pump all drainage to the top of the property and to Saratoga Los
Gatos Road. Currently, there are mature trees along the back of the property which will be impacted by the drainage construction, but are not referenced in the list of impacted trees. Furthermore, loss of mature trees along the back of the property will further aggravate the existing neighbor screen and impact privacy. The landscape plan for the subdivision lots is unrealistic and unacceptable.

The drainage plan shows a network of drainage pipes, French drain receptacles, and sump pumps. The number and placement of inlets along the back of the property is insufficient to adequately capture the drainage from the subdivision lots.

Drainage on this property is already a problem without all of the new hardscape and has moderate to severe flooding at the lowest elevation in the right rear of the property. The soil is mostly clay and has very low absorption, so landscape behaves more like hardscape and any reliance on static absorption is unrealistic. It is overly optimistic to rely on a single sump pump in the right rear corner to pump the majority of the drainage to Saratoga Los Gatos Road.
A mutually agreed retaining wall should be included along the back perimeter of the property to contain any flooding to the existing property and not affect neighbors in the event of equipment or power failure.

This overall design is problematic at best and a direct result of inadequate site design for each lot of the subdivision. The drainage plan for the subdivision lots is unrealistic and unacceptable.

Figure 19 -Increased hardscape and non-absorbing landscape underestimates drainage volume and the ability to remove drainage from the property, uphill to Saratoga Los Gatos Road, without affecting neighbors.
The drainage plan shows new cul-de-sac drainage dumped on to Saratoga Los Gatos Road. Note that there are NO collection storm drains on Saratoga Los Gatos Road, so all new drainage will flow down the street and around the corner to the intersection of Rose Avenue and Arlee Drive. This collection point already floods during moderate storms. The drainage plan for the subdivision lots is unrealistic and unacceptable.
Figure 21 - Any new drainage from the subdivision cul-de-sac dumped onto Saratoga Los Gatos Road flows to the intersection of Rose Avenue and Arlee Drive storm drain. Residents along Rose Avenue and Arlee Drive are already impacted by flooding during moderate storms.

For the above reasons, the site develop plan is inconsistent with the Monte Sereno General Plan and therefore, the site development permits for each of the subdivision lots should be denied.
7 Hillside & Scenic Corridors

Monte Sereno Policy:

- 13.04.010 Purposes, Objectives, and Application – A. The City finds and declares that the natural scenic beauty of the hillsides within the City and adjacent thereto is a priceless and irreplaceable asset to all the residents of the City.

- 13.04.010 Purposes, Objectives, and Application – B. The Council therefore declares its intention to preserve the scenic values of the hillsides and the Scenic Corridors of official State Scenic Highways within its present and future jurisdiction.

- 13.04.020 Aesthetic Values; Factors in Determining – B. Height and expanse of structures and their adaptation to terrain.

- 13.04.030 Tentative Maps; Additional Requirements and Action – B2. When any part of the property under review lies within a designated Scenic Corridor of an official State Scenic Highway or County Scenic Road, the Council shall specifically consider the appearance of the development as viewed from the Highway or Road so that service yards, parking areas, utility tanks, or other such features will be screened from view from the Highway or Road.

The landscape plan referenced in Appendix A – Project Plans, when viewed from the Scenic Corridor is insufficient to screen the subdivision lots. There are no significant landscape screening improvements beyond existing, non-maintained trees and shrubs. The plan should incorporate the addition of new mature trees and shrubs rather than just adding smaller ground cover. As a consequence, the dense tract housing of the subdivision lots rather than three architecturally interesting rural custom homes will dominate the streetscape view, which is dissimilar to other lots along the Scenic Corridor. The landscape plan for the subdivision lots is insufficient and does not adequately restore the rural landscape aesthetic values that should dominate the visual character of the site.
The streetscape views submitted by the developer to fulfill aesthetic requirements (California Environmental Quality Act, California Scenic Highway, Monte Sereno Municipal Code: Section 10.08 and Section 13.04) do not reflect a realistic representation of the view from the Scenic Corridor.

In the Initial Study document, please carefully compare the View-2-Before with View-2-After. Note that in View-2-Before (Figure 23), the mature screen trees are 4 to 5 feet above the sidewalk level. Note that in View-2-After (Figure 24), the same mature screen trees are shown as lowered to sidewalk/street level. Also note that planned removed trees are still visible and the majority of the existing screen trees were designated as poor for preservation, which will further expose the Scenic Corridor.

It is unrealistic to believe that the mature trees can be lowered without damaging their roots and killing the trees. So, the developer is either 1) planning to remove the trees as part of grading the front of the property to the sidewalk/street level, but is not showing this in the project plans or streetscape views, or 2) does not accurately represent the necessary retaining walls and elevation transitions in the project plans or streetscape views.

Also note that the setback for Lot 1 is only 15 feet to Saratoga Los Gatos Road and large mature trees are between the road and the Lot 1 house. There is not enough room to transition these height
discrepancies without retaining walls on both sides of the trees, which may damage the roots and kill the trees.

In either case, realistic streetscape views must be provided as per Scenic Corridor requirements. The subdivision site design creates an unacceptable streetscape view from the Scenic Corridor.

Figure 23 - Streetscape View-2-Before. Note that the existing mature screen trees are raised 4 to 5 feet above the sidewalk level. Note that the same mature screen trees in View-2-After (Figure 23) are lowered to the sidewalk level.
Figure 24 - Streetscape View-2-After. Mature screen trees unrealistically lowered to sidewalk level and not including necessary retaining walls and height transitions to preserve existing trees and account for Lot 1 minimum 15 foot setback.

Streetscape View-2-After portrays an overly optimistic perpendicular view into the cul-de-sac. There are no significant landscape screening improvements beyond existing, non-maintained trees and shrubs. Numerous cars/trucks will be visible on driveways and in the small short cul-de-sac. Parking along the right side of the cul-de-sac is unacceptably visible from the Scenic Corridor and creates a safety hazard.

The streetscape views submitted by the developer and referenced in the Initial Study document are overly optimistic. Note that the perpendicular View-2 (Figure 24) does not provide a good look into the cul-de-sac, which will dominate the streetscape visual impact of the property. Realistically, you will see a very short cul-de-sac surrounded by large dense tract homes, with one odd-ball-looking flat roof home.

It is reasonable to assume that based on the size of the proposed houses there will be three or more occupants and a minimum of two to three cars per household. It is also common not to park two cars in the garage, so at least one car will likely be parked on the driveway and one will be parked in the cul-de-sac to avoid the need to shuffle blocked cars. Additionally, guests, service (cleaner, gardener, etc.), and delivery vehicles will need to find parking in the cul-de-sac on a regular basis. Any special events or parties at any of the houses will cause parking issues.

The right side of the short cul-de-sac that is not curved will be convenient street parking, but will also be directly visible from the Scenic Corridor and will impose safety issues for limited visibility (due to the
raised 18061 Saratoga Los Gatos Road frontage) right turn entrance into the cul-de-sac from the
highway.

Because of the very short cul-de-sac, the number of houses, and the proximity of houses, parking will be
extremely crowded and an unacceptable number of vehicles will be full-time visible from the Scenic
Corridor, looking more like a condominium complex and degrading the rural landscape aesthetic values
that should dominate the visual character of the site.

For the above reasons, the Hillside and Scenic Corridor requirements are not satisfied and therefore the
site development permits for each of the subdivision lots should be denied.

8 Community Opposition

The developer did not gain the support of neighbors prior to submitting the subdivision site plans as is
typical in Monte Sereno. As a result, the neighborhood opposition against the proposal has been strong
and vocal.

The developer has not communicated with neighbors since submitting the initial application in August,
2017, as he felt that he could force approval based solely on existing zoning and empty threats of
building low-income and multi-family housing. The current subdivision proposal only includes maximum
priced, high-income housing.

A community opposition petition (Web Address: bit.ly/No_18081_Subdivision) has been circulated and
has gained 114 signatures and comments as of 3/21/2019 from both Monte Sereno and nearby
neighboring communities, as these are also affected by impacts to the Scenic Corridor. Note that
prominent city leaders and previous City Council members strongly oppose this subdivision project.
Numerous opposition letters have been sent to the City Council and recorded to the public record.
Public hearing opposition to the current subdivision proposal will be strong.

9 Conclusion

I started regularly attending City Council meetings and voicing objection to the 18081 Saratoga Los
Gatos Road subdivision proposal in June, 2017, directly after the initial application was submitted to the
City. By coincidence, a second-story addition Site Development permit at 17618 San Benito Way (SS-17-
06), which was denied by the Site & Architecture Committee, was being appealed to the City Council.
The applicant and his representatives spoke for the project, but many neighbors spoke against the
project, stating concerns about the raised vantage point over the Via Sereno neighborhood, the resulting bulk of the structure, and the impact on privacy. The City Council also denied the site development permit with a 5-0 vote. It gave me hope that both the Site & Architecture and the City Council would respect the inputs from affected residents and not allow new development to impact their Monte Sereno dream.

The 18081 Saratoga Los Gatos Road subdivision proposal is so much worse in so many ways (as detailed above!). The conclusion is obvious, the site development plan for the subdivision lots:

- Disrupts the 100 year old configuration and degrades the existing neighborhood and Scenic Corridor character of custom single-family homes on rural lots
- Imposes severe visual impact, invades privacy, harms property values, and unacceptably interferes with views from neighboring properties, especially for 18050 Arlee Drive
- Is inconsistent with the General Plan, Monte Sereno Design Guidelines, Site Development requirements, and Hillside & Scenic Corridor requirements
- Does not minimize grading and retention of natural contours by grading the hillside flat, not implementing split home design, and using stilts
- Destroys existing mature trees and the natural landscape beyond established limits
- Insufficiently restores landscape aesthetics with use of native materials and aggravates drainage issues

Neighbors, previous city leaders, and the greater Monte Sereno community are strongly opposed to this development. The 18081 Saratoga Los Gatos Road site development plan for the subdivision lots do not meet Monte Sereno’s high standards for new development and must be denied. Please do not allow this type of development in Monte Sereno. Please do not ruin our Monte Sereno dream!

**We request that the Monte Sereno Site & Architecture Committee deny the site development permit applications!**
10 Sources

1. Monte Sereno General Plan,
   http://cityofmontesereno.org/DocumentCenter/View/1397/General-Plan?bidId=

2. Monte Sereno Design Guidelines,

3. Monte Sereno Municipal Code,
   https://library.municode.com/ca/monte_sereno/codes/code_of_ordinances

4. 18081 Saratoga Los Gatos Road 3-lot Subdivision, Initial Study,
    http://www.montesereno.org/DocumentCenter/View/1787/Initial-Study?bidId=

5. 18081 Saratoga Los Gatos Road 3-lot Subdivision, Appendix A – Project Plans,
    http://www.montesereno.org/DocumentCenter/View/1771/Appendix-A---Project-Plans?bidId=

6. 18081 Saratoga Los Gatos Road 3-lot Subdivision, Appendix D – Noise Assessment Study,
    http://cityofmontesereno.org/DocumentCenter/View/1774/Appendix-D---Noise-Assessment-Study?bidId=

7. 18081 Saratoga Los Gatos Road 3-lot Subdivision, Appendix E – Traffic Impact Analysis,

8. 18081 Saratoga Los Gatos Road 3-lot Subdivision, Appendix F – Tree Inventory and Assessment,
    http://cityofmontesereno.org/DocumentCenter/View/1776/Appendix-F---Tree-Inventory-and-Assessment?bidId=

9. Response to 2nd Resubmittal, TM-17-01, Proposed Tentative Map (Subdivision) at 18081 Saratoga Los Gatos Road APN 410-20-036, 7/31/2018, City of Monte Sereno, CA