



10/9/2020

VIA EMAIL

David Hung, Associate Planner
City of Sacramento Community Development Department
300 Richards Boulevard, 3rd Floor
Sacramento, CA 95811

RE: Mandolin Estates (DR20-153)

Dear Mr. Hung:

We'd like to follow up on our October 7, 2020 letter commenting on the Mandolin Estates project. WALKSacramento envisions that all people, regardless of race, income, or ability, live in neighborhoods that are designed for health and happiness. Mandolin Estates will increase the supply of homes that are affordable to more people in Sacramento - it's expected that the 13-home project will be the home of 60 low-income individuals and an estimated 40 children¹.

We commend the applicant for proposing active living space at the front of every house. However, the pop-out vestibule with a side door that's proposed for twelve of the thirteen homes reduces the street view by about 50% - from a potential 180° to about 90°. Residents in any one home will not be able to see what's happening on half of the street near their home.

Unobstructed and direct views of the street and front yards from within homes are necessary to provide a visual and psychological connection between people inside and people outside. This is especially important to parents so they can feel comfortable allowing their children to play in front of their home or their neighbors' homes while they watch from inside.

The reduction of the viewing angle of the street by the pop-out vestibule has the greatest negative impact on Lots 1 and 13 at the intersection of Mandola Court at 50th Avenue. The existing houses on Keasling Court at the northwest and northeast corners do not appear to have windows that allow the occupants to see the intersection without standing at the window. The street should be visible by people moving, standing, or sitting within rooms at the front of the house rather than being up against the window to allow adequate observation.

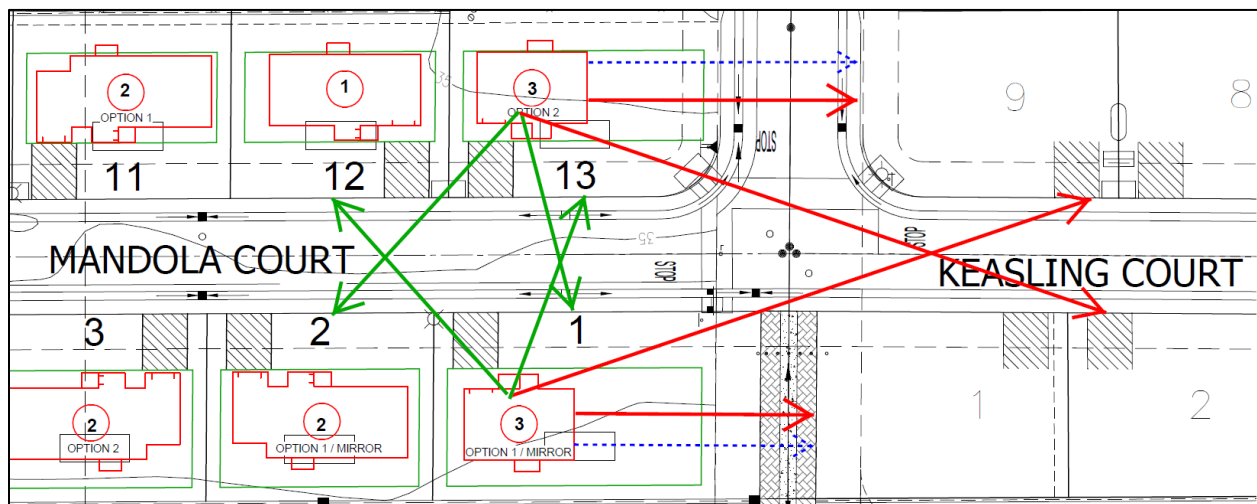
The side yard fences for the two existing homes on Keasling Court further diminishes the connection between private space and public space. There is one small, high window in a half-bath, but it provides only daylight and ventilation, not a view of the street. The two houses each have a side window directly facing the side street, but because the side-yard fence extends to the front of the house, the windows can not provide any benefit to people on the street or allow the occupants to keep an eye on street activity. Figure 1 shows the Google street view of the intersection from Mandolin Court.

¹ Elisabeth Smith, "Back To Building: Habitat For Humanity Returns To Projects After Furloughs," CBS Sacramento (CBS Sacramento, August 6, 2020), <https://sacramento.cbslocal.com/2020/08/06/habitat-for-humanity-projects-sacramento/>.



1 Intersection of 50th Avenue at Mandolin Court/Keasling Court looking north

The Mandolin Estates Plan 1272 on Lots 1 and 13, as proposed, will do little to provide "eyes on the intersection." Revision 1 of the plans added a window facing 50th Avenue in the second-floor bedroom, but bedrooms are not active living spaces that provide "open eyes" much of the time. Bedrooms can supplement rooms that are actively occupied, but they should not be the primary rooms overlooking the street. Plan 1272's contribution to "eyes on the street" is reduced by the deep setback of the house from the street and the fence may block the bedroom view of the closest sidewalk on 50th Avenue. Figure 2 illustrates the sightlines with green arrows representing views from active living space, red arrows representing missing first-floor views, and dashed blue arrows representing views from second-floor bedrooms.



2 Sightlines from interior of Plan 1272 on Lots 1 and 13.

We have five recommendations that would improve "eyes on the intersection." These recommendations are listed in order of what we believe is ease of implementation.

First, since the pop-out vestibule doesn't have a coat closet opposite the front door as found in the pop-outs in the other plans, there may be an opportunity to add a window that faces the intersection and is unobstructed by the fence. Its viewing angle from the living room would be severely limited, but it would be a slight improvement.

Second, adding a window to the half space landing on the stairwell could provide another viewing point and add additional interest to the two-story elevation facing 50th Avenue. The effectiveness of this window would be less than the pop-out vestibule window, but the window would improve the "eyes on the intersection" a little more.

The next recommendation may be the most difficult to implement but when combined with the fourth recommendation it would have the greatest benefit.

Third, move the house close to the street side yard setback to provide greater visibility of the street from the bedroom window. Having the house closer to the street would also reduce a sense of isolation on the street that derives from fences being close by and houses far away.

With the house closer to the street, the side yard fence need only extend from the rear property line to the rear corner of the house. The large side yard would be on the opposite side of the house providing greater privacy in the outdoor space and less street noise from the opening in the sound wall on Power Inn Road. Moving the house and retracting the fence would produce the opportunity to add first-floor windows facing 50th Avenue.

The fourth recommendation, which requires moving the house as recommended above, is to replace the upper half of the linen closet with a window. This would provide a view from the hallway from the living room that leads to the bathroom, the stairs, and a bedroom.

Fifth, and also dependent upon the third recommendation, is to add a window or move the rear window in the bedroom to provide some part-time "eyes on the street."

In summary, we make the following recommendations for Plan 1272 on Lots 1 and 13 in order of potential benefit.

- **Move the house close to the street side yard setback and run the fence from the rear property line to the northern rear corner of the house.**
- **Replace the upper half of the linen closet with a window facing north.**
- **Add a window facing north and opposite the front door in the pop-out vestibule.**
- **Add a window facing north on the stairwell's half space landing.**
- **Add a window facing north in the first-floor bedroom.**

WALKSacramento is working to support increased physical activity such as walking and bicycling in local neighborhoods as well as helping to create community environments that support walking and bicycling. The benefits include improved public health and physical fitness, better air quality, a stronger sense of cohesion and safety in neighborhoods, and more sustainable communities and local economies.

Sincerely,

Chris Holm
Project Manager