

13. Single Family Individual Review (includes SSO, Eichler preservation)

- What type of design guidelines should be developed to preserve neighborhood character?
- Is the current process working?
- If so, give examples. If not, what should be changed?

Stewart Carl:

I support SSOs, which seem to be working, and preservation of Palo Alto's Eichler neighborhoods, historic neighborhoods, and other neighborhoods with unique personalities.

Leonard Ely III:

- I think this is something that needs to be discussed within the neighborhoods. Restricting the use of the lot will reduce its value. You really can't do that after the fact. If everyone in the neighborhood understands that and is willing to place a deed restriction on their properties than I would be OK with that. However, it will never work as a checkerboard.
- Is the current process working? No

Adrian Fine:

I think the current Individual Review Guidelines are working well, although the process could be sped up.

On the SSOs that have come before the planning commission, it does not seem like there is a standardized, democratic, neighborhood process, and this worries me deeply. The city needs to create a "kit" or template which interested neighborhoods can use for this process, because this is a long-term decision.

Finally, SSOs do absolutely nothing to protect Eichler homes, which could be torn down and replaced with a different single-story home. Palo Alto should look to cities like Sunnyvale which has a number of Eichler Preservation Districts.

John Fredrich:

Let the neighborhoods decide how many stories they want but be vigilant in protecting the daylight plain rules.

Arthur Keller:

The Individual Review guidelines are not working effectively. They are ambiguous and not sufficiently clear. By changing the guidelines to clear rules, they can be better enforced.

When the plans do indicate that textured glass or opaque windows are required, the Building Inspectors sometimes fail to enforce these rules.

Eichler neighborhoods are especially vulnerable to loss of privacy from two story houses. And when those new buildings are in a flood zone, elevation of the building above the Base Flood Elevation, as required by FEMA rules, exacerbates the privacy problem.

Liz Kniss:

- What type of design guidelines should be developed to preserve neighborhood character?
We currently have individual review (IR) and we recently attempted to establish guidelines in the Eichler communities for second stories and I believe this is in process.
- Is the current process working?
The current process to protect single-story overlays involves a democratic vote of those residents living in the designated area, requiring 70% participation. We have protected 12 areas where Eichler tracts are located. The process seems to be effective and the oldest tract was established in the 1990s.
- If so, give examples. If not, what should be changed?
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Lydia Kou:

As stated in the Zoning Code, the goals and purposes of the City's discretionary Individual Review intended to mitigate the effects of second story construction on neighboring home and to:

- Promote new construction that is compatible with existing residential neighborhoods (Eichler neighborhood)
- Encourage respect for the surrounding context in which residential construction and alteration takes place
- Foster consideration of neighbors' concerns with respect to privacy, scale and massing, and streetscape
- Enable the emergence of new neighborhood design patterns that reflect awareness of each property's effect upon neighboring properties

Some thoughts on this –

1. I think the applicant and their architect can make a big difference by starting a conversation with neighbors and their design and plans well before plans are submitted to the city.
2. The preliminary IR review must delineate the fine line of becoming a design review and then, become massive and expensive changes for the applicant.
3. Lack of follow through from the City inspections to ensure compliance by applicant of what was negotiated and agreed upon by the neighbor affected and applicant.

Danielle Martell:

DID NOT RESPOND

Don McDougall:

- What type of design guidelines should be developed to preserve neighborhood character?
 - a) Design guidelines should be on a neighborhood level and used consistently within the neighborhood. Eichler preservation should be well defined and followed, potentially with a task force from Eichler neighborhoods. Eichler design guidelines should be comparable with the unique characteristics of the homes and responsive to privacy concerns of residents.
- Is the current process working?
 - a) The current process is not working well and needs more specific attention by potentially a separate ARB.
- If so, give examples. If not, what should be changed?
 - a) The goal would be to have no neighbors fighting neighbors. That will require strong guidelines bring all members together and Council to initiate a stake holder process.

Greer Stone:

It is very important to have Single Family Individual Review for proposed projects. Each neighborhood in Palo Alto is unique. What works in Crescent Park may not work in Midtown, and we must consider the visual unity of our streets and neighborhoods. The current process brings balance to a homeowner's right to expand their home, with the neighborhood's valid concern to ensure synergy and compatibility with the surrounding community.

I am also a proponent of Eichler preservation and creating policies to protect these unique regional architecture gems. I believe in seeking community input as often as possible – ensuring neighborhoods are heard when new projects are proposed. Having Single Family Individual Review allows neighbors to have a voice in the look and feel of their home block. This is critical, and must be maintained.

Greg Tanaka:

- What type of design guidelines should be developed to preserve neighborhood character?

Some neighborhoods are clearly defined, and others are part of larger neighborhoods. I would like to have staff work with neighborhood organizations to find the right balance that can identify how to modify the city-wide general ordinances that need to form the baseline of general code, with organized neighborhood initiatives to identify boundaries and design guidelines—many already called out in local CC&Rs but outdated by state law.
- Is the current process working?

Yes, in that a number of homogenous neighborhoods have used the city's process to self-restrict development. And no, in that it needs to be better outlined, better defined and with more up-front assistance in the process from the city.
- If so, give examples. If not, what should be changed?

A final vote by the neighbors affected should have a pre-defined affirmation percentage, a clear ballot message of change, and additional staff should be hired to help accommodate these initiatives.