

Midcoast Community Council

An elected Advisory Council to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors

representing Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada, Princeton, and Miramar

PO Box 248, Moss Beach, CA 94038-0248 | midcoastcommunitycouncil.org

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Chair Vice-Chair Secretary Treasurer

Date: January 27, 2021
To: San Mateo Planning and Building Department
 Jonathan Cox, Coastside Fire Protection District
Cc: Summer Burlison, San Mateo County Project Planner
 Mike Crivello, San Mateo County Code Compliance Manager
From: Midcoast Community Council
Subject: **Code Violation for exterior lighting for Fire Station (PLN2016-00346)**

On July 19, 2017 the San Mateo County Planning Commission approved the construction of a new 12,425 square foot, single-story, 3-bay fire station on an undeveloped parcel zoned El Granada Gateway (EG) in the unincorporated area of El Granada, approximately 300 feet north of the Pacific Ocean, east of Hwy 1 and bounded by four roadways: Avenue Alhambra to the north, Coronado Street to the east, Obispo Road to the south, and Avenue Portola to the west. This new fire station replaced the existing Fire Station 41 located at 531 Obispo Road.

Conditions of approval were based on the adopted mitigation measures from the certified 2017 Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) which took into consideration comments from residents to ensure lighting was in compliance with the San Mateo County Midcoast LCP (Local Coastal Program) 2013 section 8.18 which requires that Development blend with and be subordinate to the environment and the character of the area where located and be as unobtrusive as possible and not detract from the natural, open space or visual qualities of the area. Section 8.18 also requires that exterior lighting shall be limited to the minimum necessary for safety and that all lighting both exterior and interior must be placed, designed, and shielded so as to confine direct rays to the parcel where the lighting is located. The photo rendering presented to the community in the FEIR (Photo 1) was not a correct representation of the final product as it did not show any lighting. Comments from residents during the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process relayed that the neighbors were concerned that the lighting would be a significant change, with one resident writing that "backyard stargazing would no longer be an option" as the view facing the west/southwest, once previously "nice and dark," would be significantly impacted by the lighting of this project. Another comment was "the Proposed Fire Station 41 will cause light pollution and will substantially damage scenic resources." A third comment said, "It would cause a significant aesthetic impact by having a substantial adverse impact on a scenic vista; it will substantially degrade the existing visual character of the neighborhood and its surroundings; and it will cause a new source of substantial light and glare which will adversely affect nighttime views in the area."

The FEIR agreed with these comments from residents stating "potentially significant environmental impacts were determined to require analysis based on the Initial Study." These impacts would be mitigated to less than significant because the project would "***undergo Design Review for conformance with all policies of the San Mateo County LCP to ensure the design; character, height, scale, and mass ... is compatible with the area***" and that "***the overall character of the site and surrounding area would not be substantially altered.***" This is indeed what did occur with the subsequent San Mateo County Planning Commission's Letter of Decision with **Final Project Approval** requirements that the applicant shall meet the Conditions of Approval (Attachment A).

In addition, the FEIR also responded to comments regarding impacts to Biological Resources. The California Coastal Commission (Comment Letter #A01) refers to a preliminary Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area (ESHA) analysis that calls out the riparian corridor west and south of 555 Obispo Road as potential habitat for the federally threatened California red-legged frog and the federal and state endangered, fully protected San Francisco garter snake. The lighting design should have taken this into consideration to limit spillover from the fire station to the adjacent riparian corridor as this may cause a significant impact to protected species during their annual movement after the first winter rains and increase possible predation by avian and mammalian species (raccoons, coyotes, herons, egrets, cats, and foxes).

In response to community outcry, representatives of the Midcoast Community Council conducted a field survey of the fire station lighting at 6 pm (after dusk) on January 12, 2021. They confirmed residents' concerns and determined that the current lighting is excessive for the semi-rural location, especially on the southeast side having five approximately 40-foot tall light poles that obstruct the view from homeowners towards the Pacific Ocean and degrade the darkened night skies. Additional lighting includes five approximately 15-foot tall walkway/landscaping poles, multiple wall sconces, base lighting for night-time flag illumination, and various other area lights making the site reminiscent of an industrial area. Post-construction comments from residents include "looks like a prison yard" or a "Walmart parking lot" and that "bright lights adversely impact wildlife" and the additional "can the color be changed to amber to match the existing El Granada street lights?"

The Midcoast Community Council believes that the new fire station 41 is in code violation of a condition of the approved project—specifically that the project does not conform with the requirements and standards of the San Mateo County Local Coastal Program (LCP) as described in the Coastal Development Permit and has a significant impact on coastal resources, sensitive habitats, and visual resources in the area.

The Midcoast Community Council requests modifications to the light poles, base lighting at the flagpole, and all other lighting to direct rays downward to limit glare and restrict direct light to the property, as described in the Conditions of Approval and a change to amber lighting to match the existing El Granada Street lighting. Furthermore, we request review of any replacement lighting features prior to installation. We further suggest that only necessary safety lighting be on continuously after dark, and that other lights are illuminated automatically or manually as required.

MIDCOAST COMMUNITY COUNCIL
s/Michelle Weil, Chair

Attachments:

April 2017 | Final EIR



Fire Station 41 (El Granada) Replacement Project Final EIR
for the Coastside Fire Protection District

State Clearinghouse #2015062089

Photo 1: Rendering of the new fire station in the Final EIR showing no tall light poles or floodlighting.



Photo 2: Post-construction lighting on the southeast side of the new fire station 41 with 10 light poles, 2 floodlights, sconces and base lighting at the flagpole.

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES



Source: WRA Environmental Consultants, 2015; Jeff Katz Architecture, 2017; PlaceWorks, 2017.

Figure 4.3-1
Riparian Habitat and Setbacks

Photo 3: Map of riparian habitat adjacent the new fire station 41, which also is potential habitat for California red-legged frog and San Francisco garter snake.