



STAFF REPORT

DATE: FEBRUARY 2, 2026
TO: PLANNING COMMISSION
FROM: KATRINA KAWAGOE, SENIOR PLANNER
SUBJECT: PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 250150
APPLICANT: NATALIA GOUVEIA, CMS INTERIOR DESIGN, INC.
LOCATION: 1 CASABA ROAD

OVERVIEW

A Neighborhood Compatibility Determination (NC-250151) for rear yard improvements and a Grading Permit (G-250149) for the export of more than 20 cubic yards of earth materials and excavation greater than three feet in vertical height at its deepest point.

BACKGROUND

Application Filed: 11/27/2024
Application Deemed Complete: 12/9/2025
Public Notices Mailed: 1/22/2025
Public Notices Posted: 1/22/2025

The applicable Rolling Hills Estates Municipal Code Sections are Chapter 17.06 (Residential Districts Generally), Chapter 17.10 (R-A-20 District), Chapter 17.62 (Neighborhood Compatibility), and Chapter 17.07 (Grading in Residential Districts).

The Project was reviewed in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code § 21000 and following: "CEQA") and the State CEQA Guidelines (14 CCR § 15000 and following) and was determined to be Categorically Exempt under Class 3, Section 15303(e) New Construction of Small Structures. The project is consistent with the construction of accessory structures.

The subject property has a General Plan Land Use designation of Low Density Residential, is zoned Single-family Residential – Limited Agricultural District (R-A-20), and is surrounded by residential properties of the same zoning. The proposed improvements are subject to Implementation Measure 2.1.2.1 of the General Plan, which requires the City to continue to implement the Neighborhood Compatibility Ordinance.

On November 9, 2010, City Council approved Resolution No. 2240 for the development of a new subdivision that included the construction of 11 new single family residential lots, two landscape lots, one commercial recreation designated lot, and a new private road (Casaba Road) that parallels Palos Verdes Drive North and connects to Montecillo Drive.

The Casaba Estates HOA was assembled to manage the new development, including the maintenance of the new private road. The subject property is immediately adjacent to this development, but was sold independently from the subdivision. Consequently, it is not a part of the HOA, despite the subject property fronting Casaba Road.

On December 7, 2015, the Planning Commission approved Resolution No. PA-38-15 granting a Neighborhood Compatibility Determination for a new single-story residence at the subject location located at the corner of Palos Verdes Drive North and Montecillo Drive, immediately east of Casaba Estates-owned landscaping property.

A notice was distributed to the property owners within a 500' radius of the subject property. Staff did not receive comment letters regarding the project. Any additional correspondence received after agenda distribution and prior to the February 2, 2026 Planning Commission meeting, will be distributed to the Commission via separate memo.

DISCUSSION

Existing Site Conditions

The subject property consists of a 25,068-square-foot (SF) irregularly shaped, tapered lot situated at the intersection of Casaba Road, Montecillo Drive, and Palos Verdes Drive North. While the building pad is relatively flat, a significant berm borders the perimeter of the parcel along its Montecillo Drive and Palos Verdes Drive North frontages. Due to the lot's unique geometry, this berm occupies a substantial portion of the yard area. To accommodate these site constraints, a Variance was approved in 2015 to reduce the required rear yard setback from 35' to 20'.

The home was completed in 2019 and consists of a 5,655 SF single-story residence featuring, five bedrooms, five bathrooms, and an attached three-car garage. Since its original construction, no additional permits have been pulled for this property. During the initial proposal review, it was identified that a significant portion of the existing fencing was encroaching onto the Casaba Estates landscaping property to the west. As a Condition of Approval for the current project, this fencing will be removed and relocated to sit entirely along or within the legal property lines of 1 Casaba Road.

Proposed Revisions

The applicant proposes a comprehensive site renovation designed to maximize usable outdoor space through new hardscape and grading. Central to the request is the construction of an approximately 200' long, 4' high retaining wall along the rear and side yard berm. The wall is designed with a minimum 2' setback at the south property line, increasing significantly along the rest of the berm's length. To mitigate the visual mass of the structure, the applicant has incorporated 4' wide planters every 15' and integrated built-in concrete seating. Additionally, the existing BBQ will be relocated and integrated into this new wall assembly.

Further improvements include the installation of a 790 SF swimming pool and a 240 SF pool equipment enclosure within the east side yard. The project also entails a significant expansion of the property's hardscape, adding approximately 1,300 SF of patio area. This results in a 1,420 SF east patio that wraps around the southeast corner of the residence and a secondary 308 SF patio in the south rear yard.

Utility and access modifications include the relocation of an existing condenser unit to the front of the residence, where it will be screened within a dedicated trash enclosure. For improved access to the new pool area, the existing 6' high fencing in the east side yard will be replaced with a 48' long, 6' high sliding gate system. Finally, the existing wrought iron fencing along the berm will be relocated to maintain a minimum 5' separation from the proposed retaining wall.

The proposed rear and side yard improvements meet the development standards outlined in the Municipal Code. The applicable Residential Development Standards are as follows:

Applicable Development Standard	Conformance with the Standard
<u>Lot coverage:</u> 30% maximum lot coverage in the R-A-20 district.	Conforms. The proposed rear yard improvements will increase lot coverage by 5.5%, resulting in a 29.5% lot coverage. Retaining walls and fencing are exempt from this calculation.
<u>Swimming Pool:</u> A minimum 5' setback from side and rear property lines.	Conforms. The pool will be setback more than 5' from side and rear property lines. The fence enclosure for the swimming pool will be required to conform to Section 8.36.050 of the City's Health and Safety Code prior to permit issuance.
<u>Retaining walls:</u> A maximum 5' high retaining walls in the side and rear yards. A minimum horizontal separation between adjacent walls and fences that equals the height of the tallest adjacent wall or fence. A minimum 2' setback from property lines is required for retaining walls.	Conforms. The maximum height of the proposed wall will not exceed 4'. A separation of 5' is proposed between the wrought iron fence and retaining wall. While most of the wall far exceeds the minimum 2' setback, the south end of the wall will be setback the minimum 2'.

Neighborhood Compatibility (NC-250151)

In an effort to maintain the established character of the existing neighborhood, neighborhood compatibility reviews assess proposals for the modification of existing

structures to ensure that the proposed architectural style and overall construction remains consistent with the existing house and neighborhood. The current proposal is for site improvements in the rear and side yard with no proposed modifications to the existing residence which maintains a Contemporary Ranch architectural style.

To maintain Neighborhood Compatibility, residential construction proposals shall address the following objectives as found in Chapter 17.62:

1. **Natural Amenities.** Improvements to residential property shall respect and preserve to the greatest extent possible existing topography, landscaping, and natural features.

The proposal satisfies the established criteria as it preserves the majority of the existing landscaping, particularly the mature vegetation along the perimeter berm. The proposed retaining wall will contain the loose, sloping soil from the berm and convert currently non-functional areas into usable outdoor space. These modifications transition the area from an underutilized slope into a cohesive, finished rear yard that enhances the overall aesthetic of the residence while maintaining the integrity of the berm.

2. **Neighborhood Character.** Proposals shall be compatible with the existing neighborhood character in terms of scale of development, architectural style and materials.

The proposal satisfies the established criteria because the scope of work is confined strictly to the side and rear yards, with no changes to the primary structure. The proposed improvements are designed to complement the existing Contemporary Ranch architectural style, extending the aesthetic character of the main residence into the rear yard to create a cohesive and updated site design.

3. **Scale.** Designs should minimize the appearance of overbuilt property to both public and private view. The square footage of the residence and total lot coverage should reflect the rural character of the City and neighborhood.

The proposal satisfies the established criterion for lot coverage as the proposed yard improvements will result in a lot coverage of 29.5%. The 5.5% increase will remain below the district's 30% maximum threshold. The proposed retaining walls are exempt from lot coverage calculations.

4. **Style.** Proposals shall address the following design elements: façade treatments (avoid stark and unbroken walls), structure height(s), open spaces, roof design, appurtenances, mass and bulk. These design elements should be compatible with the existing home and neighborhood and in all instances seek to minimize the appearance of a massive structure.

The proposal satisfies the established criteria because the proposal includes rear and side yard improvements only. The potential visual impact of the 200' wall length is successfully mitigated through architectural articulation; integrating functional elements such as planters and seating, the design breaks up the wall's expanse, creating a more human-scaled and aesthetically pleasing transition between the leveled yard and the existing berm.

5. Privacy. Proposals shall maintain an adequate separation between the proposed structures and adjacent property lines. In addition, proposed balconies, decks and windows shall respect the existing privacy of surrounding properties.

The proposal satisfies the established criteria because the proposal will respect and maintain the existing privacy of the surrounding properties. The proposal features only side and rear yard improvements, none of which will exceed the height of the current residence. Given that the residence lacks any immediate adjacent neighbors to the east and west, privacy is not impacted.

6. Views. Designs should respect existing neighboring views.

The proposal satisfies the established criterion because the proposed improvements are confined to the side and rear yard. The subject property fronts streets on three sides and a landscaping lot owned by Casaba Estates to the west. As such, the residence lacks immediate adjacent neighbors to the east and west. Neighboring views will not be affected.

Based on the analysis above, it is staff's opinion that the proposed site improvements respect existing neighbor views and are also consistent with the character of the immediate neighborhood. As such, staff is able to support an affirmative determination of Neighborhood Compatibility for this project.

Grading Criteria (G-250149)

Discretionary review by the Planning Commission of a grading application is required in the following scenarios:

1. Any excavation or fill of earth materials greater than three feet in vertical height at its deepest point;
2. Any importation or exportation of earth materials greater than twenty cubic yards;
or
3. Any grading on a slope equal to or greater than thirty-five percent.

The project falls under Scenarios 1 and 2 for discretionary review based on the following: variable cut and fill in the side and rear yards reaches a maximum depth of 4',

and the project involves a net export of 27 cubic yards of non-exempt earth materials. Pursuant to RHEMC Section 17.07.040, the volume of excavation and subsequent export required for the swimming pool (129 cubic yards) is exempt from grading thresholds. The remaining grading will consist of 49 cubic yards of cut in the rear yard and 76 cubic yards of fill throughout the east side yard. Additionally, 27 cubic yards of dirt from the excavation of the pool will also be used to fill in the side yard, resulting in a total export of 102 cubic yards of earth from the site.

The Planning Commission shall use but not be limited to the following criteria in assessing an application for grading approval:

1. The grading is not excessive beyond that necessary for the permitted primary use of the lot.

The proposal satisfies the established criterion as the primary objective of the grading is to enhance the utility of the side and rear yards, specifically to accommodate the installation of a swimming pool. All proposed retaining walls will maintain a maximum height of 4'. This remains well within the 5' height limitation prescribed by Section 17.06.380 of the Municipal Code. Furthermore, the majority of the proposed earthwork is directly associated with the pool excavation; such activity is exempt from grading approval requirements pursuant to RHEMC Section 17.07.040.B.

2. The grading and/or construction does not significantly adversely affect the visual relationships with, nor the views from, neighboring sites.

The proposal satisfies the established criterion as the grading is confined entirely to the side and rear yards. Due to the property's unique positioning, there are no adjacent residential neighbors on either side, ensuring that neighbor views remain unaffected. Furthermore, the installation of perimeter fencing—combined with the existing berm along Palos Verdes Drive North and Montecillo Drive—will continue to provide a natural visual screen, effectively shielding the rear yard and pool area from public view.

3. The nature of the grading minimizes disturbance to the natural contours; finished contours are reasonably natural.

The proposal satisfies the established criterion as the majority of the existing berm and the western side yard will remain undisturbed. The proposed grading represents the minimum extent necessary to facilitate the installation of a swimming pool and to achieve a functional level of utility for the side and rear yards.

4. The nature of the grading is in conformance with the neighborhood compatibility ordinance as set forth in Section 17.62.010.

The proposal satisfies the established criterion because the proposal meets all neighborhood compatibility findings. Pools are common in the surrounding neighborhoods and are generally approved by right. Neighborhood compatibility is

minimally impacted since the improvements are restricted to the side and rear yards and will not affect the main residence or its visible impact from the street.

5. The proposed grading meets the grading standards and design criteria as set forth in Section 17.07.080.

The proposal satisfies the established criteria laid out in the grading standards and design criteria because the proposal conforms to the required 2' grading setback from the rear property line. Additionally, the amount of cut into an existing slope is the minimum necessary cut needed to reasonably use the space while still preserving most of the landscaping throughout the berm.

CONCLUSION

Staff has worked with the applicant to address the requirements of the Municipal Code, including Neighborhood Compatibility and Grading requirements. As summarized in this report, staff is able to support the Grading application and has determined that Neighborhood Compatibility has been achieved.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission approve PA-250150, subject to the following conditions:

1. All improvements hereafter constructed or installed on land which is the subject of this approval shall be located substantially as shown on Exhibit A and/or as required under the Municipal Code and/or as required in these conditions.
2. In the event of one or more violations of these conditions, the City Manager shall have enforcement capability to remedy such violations and/or revoke said approvals.
3. The applicant must submit the entire project for plan check with the Department of Building and Safety within six months of approval of this application (RHEMC Section 17.72.110.C.2), with two six-month time extensions maximum allowed to be granted by the Planning Commission. All colors and materials shall be noted on plans and Zone Clearance is contingent upon adherence to the conditions of approval.
4. Per RHEMC Section 8.20.120, the City of Rolling Hills Estates maintains an exclusive franchise agreement with Waste Management, for the collection of solid waste, recycling, and green waste services for residential and non-residential properties, as well as for the collection of construction-related generated waste for residential and non-residential projects. All bins maintained on private property and/or any bins placed in the Public Right of Way, with benefit of an encroachment permit during construction activities, must be contracted through Waste

Management. Service may be coordinated by contacting Waste Management at (800) 774-0222.

5. The applicant must remove and relocate all existing fencing located on the Casaba Estates HOA property, to be on or within the property boundaries of 1 Casaba Road. The applicant must remove all fencing-related debris from the Casaba Estates HOA property.
6. Trucks transporting dirt, organic material, and demolition debris from the site must be covered and hosed down in a location on-site prior to exiting the property. Any trucks transporting dirt and or organic material to the site must be covered or properly secured to prevent off-site debris to the satisfaction of the City Traffic Engineer.
7. All construction activity is limited to the hours between 7:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. Monday through Friday, and 9:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. on Saturday. No work is permitted on Sundays or holidays (New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day).
8. No queuing of trucks or arrival of construction materials and/or workers to the construction site is permitted outside the permitted construction hours and days.
9. The applicant must comply with the City's Noise Ordinance during the construction of the project.
10. The applicant must comply with all applicable NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination Systems) requirements.

Attachments

- A. Plans*
- B. Grading Application*