



STAFF REPORT

DATE: MARCH 2, 2026
TO: PLANNING COMMISSION
FROM: KATRINA KAWAGOE, SENIOR PLANNER
SUBJECT: PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 260013
APPLICANT: REIKO MICHLIG, REIKO ARCHITECTURE
LOCATION: 3554 LARIAT LANE

OVERVIEW

A request for a Neighborhood Compatibility Determination (NC-260014) for an interior remodel and additions to an existing two-story, single-family residence that includes 474 SF of first story additions and a 570 SF second story addition; and a Variance (V-260015) to exceed the required height to setback ratio in the west side yard.

BACKGROUND

Application Filed: 12/18/25
Application Deemed Complete: 02/13/26
Public Notices Mailed: 02/20/26
Public Notices Posted: 02/20/26

The applicable Rolling Hills Estates Municipal Code Sections are Chapter 17.06 (Residential Districts Generally), Chapter 17.10 (R-A-20 District), Chapter 17.36 (H District), Chapter 17.62 (Neighborhood Compatibility), and Chapter 17.66 (Variances).

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 1 of the State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15301(e)(1) (Existing Facilities). The project is consistent with the minor alteration of a private structure with no change to the existing use.

The subject property is designated as Low Density Residential in the General Plan and is zoned Single-family Residential – Limited Agricultural District (R-A-20), falling within the Horse Overlay. Geographically, the site is situated north of Palos Verdes Drive North, bordering the City of Rolling Hills Estates to the north and the Botanic Gardens (Unincorporated Los Angeles County) beyond. The site is flanked by residential neighbors of the same zoning to the south, west, and east. Consequently, the proposed

improvements are subject to Implementation Measure 2.1.2.1 of the General Plan, requiring the City to apply the Neighborhood Compatibility Ordinance.

The property is not located within a Homeowners' Association. Consequently, Staff requested and obtained signatures from the immediately adjacent neighbors (Attachment C), while all property owners within a 500' radius of the subject property have been formally notified of the project. To date, staff has received one letter in opposition of the proposed project (Attachment D). Staff reached out to the letter's author, offered to meet and provide detailed information about the project, but the resident declined to meet with staff and requested that identifying information be redacted from the public record. Any additional correspondence received after agenda distribution and prior to the March 2, 2026 Planning Commission meeting will be distributed to the Commission via separate memo.

A silhouette has been erected on the property to demonstrate the mass and bulk of the proposed additions and has been certified by a licensed engineer as accurately depicting the proposed plans (Attachment E). Staff recommends that the Planning Commission visit the property prior to the meeting, to better understand the characteristics of the project, as well as those of the neighborhood.

DISCUSSION

Existing Site Conditions

The subject property consists of a 22,728 square-foot (SF) lot characterized by varied topography. While the primary building pad is relatively flat, there is an ascending slope toward the rear, the front yard features a significant downward slope toward a road easement for Lariat Lane. A 25' portion of the northern property line is occupied by a private road, which turns to extend along the western boundary. The site is uniquely situated, flanked by this private road to the west and a private driveway to the east, the latter of which provides access to two flag lots behind the subject property. Primary access is currently provided via two separate driveways—one originating from the eastern property line and another from Lariat Lane—though the latter is constrained by a significant slope.

The existing 3,191 SF two-story, split-level, single-family residence was constructed in 1972 and has seen no significant improvements since its original completion. It is positioned approximately 65' from the front property line, 20' from both the east and west side property lines, and over 100' from the rear property line. The five bedroom and three bathroom home features a front-facing garage; however, due to the front yard topography, the garage functions similarly to a side-facing garage, as vehicles must approach from the east before turning into the home. A large front porch with steps wrapping around a low wall provides access to the main entrance.

Behind the residence, a 3'-high retaining wall spans the width of the property, separating the main house and a large concrete patio from the rear yard. The rear of the lot currently

contains horse keeping facilities and several accessory structures, including a 345 SF shed in the southern corner. A review of the property's permit history indicates that these structures were constructed without the benefit of building permits. While the applicant may remove these facilities in the future to accommodate a potential pool and patio (which are not included in this proposal), a condition of approval will be required to ensure all unpermitted structures are either legalized or removed.

Proposed Project

The applicant is proposing an extensive interior remodel and a 1,044 SF expansion of an existing two-story, single-family residence. The project aims to modernize the home's interior layout and increase living area while maintaining the building's original architectural character. The renovation involves the demolition of most of the interior walls and will create an open-concept living, dining, and kitchen area, reconfigure the home's bedrooms, and create 2.5 additional bathrooms.

On the first level, a 474 SF addition is proposed. 166 SF of this expansion will occur under the existing roofline at the eastern front face of the home, repurposing an existing porch area to enlarge the kitchen and entry foyer. An additional 308 SF expansion is situated toward the rear and western side of the property to facilitate a larger family room, bar area, and wine cellar. External site improvements for the first floor include the installation of an entry ramp, the reorientation of the front entry stairs to improve the street-facing profile, and the rotation of the internal garage staircase. The project also includes new mechanical equipment, including a tankless water heater and an AC condenser unit.

The second-level expansion adds 570 square feet to the rear and western portions of the home, significantly enlarging the primary bedroom and adding three bedrooms, a laundry room, and a rumpus room. This upper-story addition projects toward the rear yard, terminating in alignment with an existing retaining wall and creating a 260 SF covered concrete patio on the ground level. A new 159 SF second-story deck is also proposed, offering private outdoor space overlooking the rear yard. Exterior modifications are intended to be minimal and cohesive, featuring new sand-finish stucco, skylights, and the replacement of all windows, doors, and roofing to match the existing aesthetic.

While the project complies with the maximum building height of 27' and the required 15' street-facing side yard setback, the vertical massing of the addition does not meet the height-to-setback ratio, outlined in RHEMC Section 17.06.180, which requires that portions of structures over 14' in height to be set back an additional foot for every foot of additional height. Because the proposed two-story addition exceeds the height-to-setback ratio along the west side yard, the applicant is requesting a Variance to permit the encroachment.

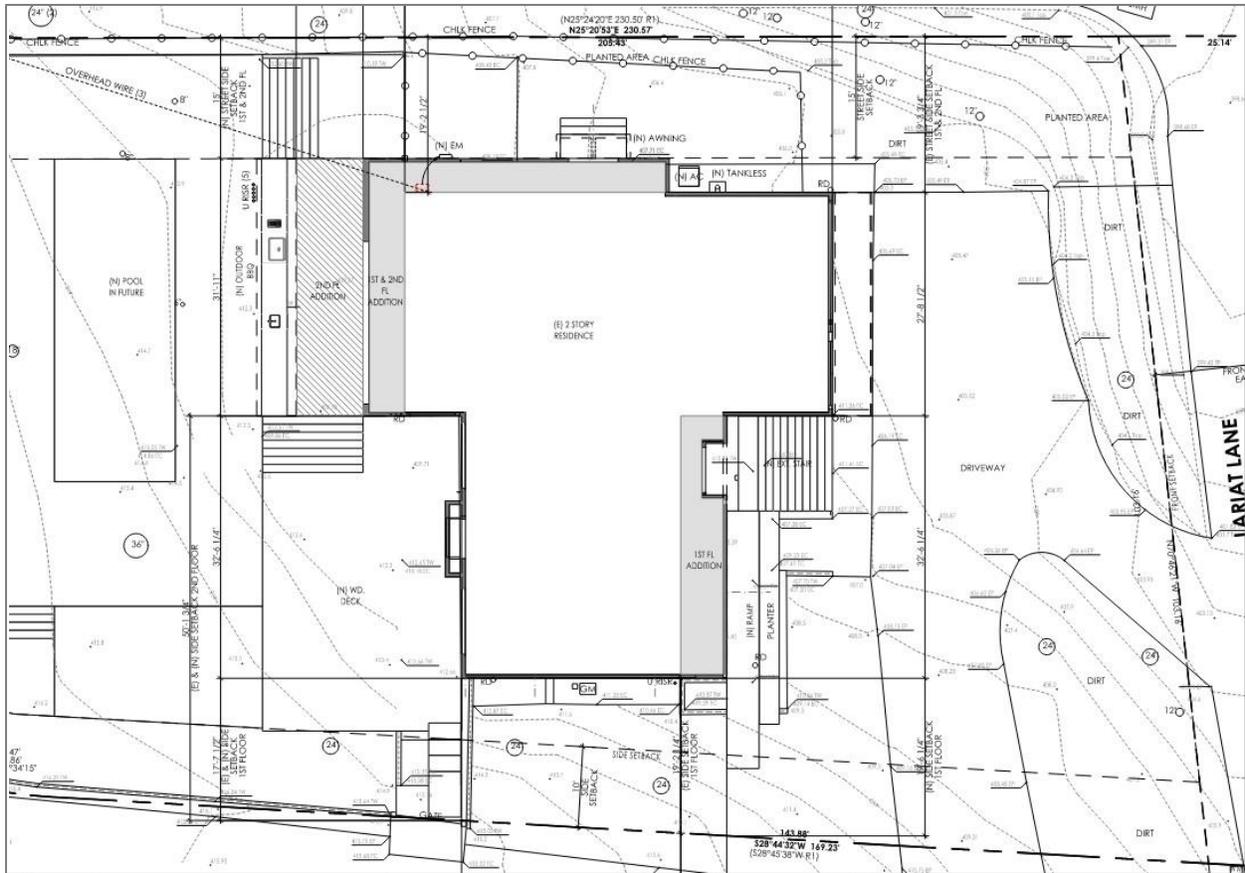


Figure 1: Proposed site plan

Table 2: Conformance with Residential Development Standards

Applicable Development Standard	Conformance with the Standard
<p><u>Building height & Height-to-setback ratio:</u> 27 feet maximum residential building height</p>	<p>Variance Requested. The overall building height does not exceed 27' at any point. However, the proposed two-story addition does not comply with the height-to-setback ratio.</p>
<p><u>Front yard, developed lots:</u> Front yard shall constitute that area between the front property line and the entire front face of the main building and any accessory structures.</p> <p>No structure shall be constructed in a front yard.</p> <p>The front yard must have a depth of not less than twenty-five feet.</p>	<p>Conforms. The proposed single-story front yard addition will extend into an existing front porch and will remain under the existing roof line. Therefore, the existing depth of the front yard will not change.</p>

<p><u>Side yard – facing a street:</u> The required side yard abutting a street is 20% of the width of the lot, but is not required to be greater than 15’.</p>	<p>Conforms. The proposed two-story addition will be 15’ from the side property line.</p>
<p><u>Lot coverage:</u> 30% maximum lot coverage in the R-A-20 district.</p>	<p>Conforms. The proposal will result in lot coverage of 19%, well below the maximum 30% lot coverage for the district.</p>

Neighborhood Compatibility (NC-260014)

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 includes first and second story additions to an existing two-story, split-level residence.

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.

These criteria are met as the proposal involves only minimal alterations to the landscaping within the west side yard. The majority of the improvements are either contained within the existing building footprint or situated over an existing concrete patio in the rear yard. Consequently, the site’s topography will remain largely undisturbed, preserving the property’s primary natural features.

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

These criteria are met as the project’s scale, architectural style, and material palette represent a cohesive blend of Farmhouse and Ranch styles typical of the surrounding area. Exterior modifications are designed to be restrained; the use of new sand-finish stucco will maintain a texture consistent with the original residence. While the proposed additions will increase the total floor area to 4,869 SF—exceeding the neighborhood average of 3,508 SF—the resulting size remains within the established range of homes in the immediate vicinity (Attachment F). Furthermore, at 19% lot coverage, the project remains significantly below the 30% maximum allowed for the district.

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.

This criterion is met because the 19% lot coverage is well under the RA-20 zoning district's 30% limit, preserving the open, rural character of the lot. To minimize the visual impact of the added mass, the bulk of the two-story addition is located at the rear of the residence. The portion of the addition extending into the west side yard is screened by a line of mature trees, making it minimally visible from the street. The resulting 4,869 SF home remains proportional to other larger homes in the neighborhood (Attachment F).

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.

These criteria are met as the exterior improvements utilize finishes that are similar to the existing residence. While the proposed height of 25'-10" necessitates a Variance for the height-to-setback ratio, the design improves the home's current architectural state. The existing west-facing facade currently consists of an unbroken, unarticulated wall; the proposed addition will introduce new architectural articulation and dimension to this elevation. By breaking up the vertical plane, the design achieves the underlying intent of the height-to-setback requirement—minimizing the perception of mass—despite the technical need for a Variance.

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.

This criterion is met as the project respects the privacy of adjacent neighbors while maintaining the required 15' minimum setback. Although the applicant is requesting a Variance for the height-to-setback ratio, the physical distance to the property line remains code-compliant. While the new 159 SF second-story deck introduces a new elevated viewing area, it is noted that the immediately adjacent neighbors have reviewed and expressed their support for the project (Attachment C).

6. **Views.** Designs should respect existing neighboring views.

This criterion is met as the subject property is situated among a mix of one- and two-story residences. The proposed improvements match the existing building height and are not anticipated to obstruct or negatively impact any protected neighboring views.

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.

Variance (V-260015)

The applicant is requesting a Variance (V-260015) to allow the construction of the proposed west side yard addition to exceed the height to setback ratio requirement per RHEMC Section 17.06.180 that requires any portions of structures in excess of 14' to be setback an additional foot for every additional foot in height.

Staff is able to make the findings for the Variances, as stated below:

1. That there are exceptional or extraordinary circumstances or conditions applicable to the property involved, or to its intended use which do not apply generally to other property in the same zoning district and neighborhood.

The finding can be made because the property is developed with an existing non-conforming two-story residence where the western building plane currently consists of an unbroken, vertical wall reaching a height of 25'-10". The proposed addition is designed to align with this existing building plane, to ensure structural and architectural continuity. Requiring a step-back for the new addition would create an irregular and disjointed building massing that is inconsistent with the home's original design. Furthermore, the presence of mature, dense foliage along this property line provides a natural screen that is unique to this lot, effectively mitigating the visual impact. Additionally, the proposed addition will create architectural articulation in the westerly building face that will break up the unbroken, vertical plane which is the underlying intent of the height-to-setback requirement.

2. That such variances are necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of a substantial property right of the applicant, which right is possessed by other property owners under like conditions in the same zoning district and neighborhood.

The findings can be made because the ability to expand a primary residence to meet modern functional needs—specifically the creation of adequate bedroom and living space—is a substantial property right enjoyed by other owners in the RA-20 zoning district. Many neighboring properties of similar sizes have been allowed to maintain or expand two-story mass to provide modern amenities. Denying the Variance would force a stepped architectural design that is not present on the existing structure, thereby depriving the applicant of the right to an aesthetically cohesive home expansion. Since the project maintains the required 15' side yard setback and remains under the maximum 27' height limit, the Variance simply allows the applicant to enjoy the same buildable

volume and architectural symmetry as neighboring properties that are not constrained by similar pre-existing non-conforming wall planes.

3. That the granting of the variance will not be materially detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to property and improvements in the zoning district and neighborhood in which the property is located.

This finding can be made because the proposed improvements meet Neighborhood Compatibility criteria, will not present any privacy impacts, and will require all necessary Building and Safety permits to be constructed, and are thereby not detrimental to the public welfare and neighborhood.

4. That the granting of such a variance will not be contrary to the objectives of the master plan.

This finding can be made because Policy 2.7 of the Land Use Element of the General Plan states that the City continues to implement the City's Neighborhood Compatibility Ordinance with which the Variance request complies.

5. That the granting of the variance will not authorize a use or activity which is not otherwise expressly authorized by the zone regulations governing the parcel of property

This finding can be made because single-family residences are permitted in the RA-20 zoning district and the granting of the Variance will allow the property owner to continue to utilize and improve their property with residential site improvements. The Variance will allow for flexibility in the strict interpretation of the RA-20 District requirements intended for the development of traditional lots without the unique circumstances or existing constraints.

CONCLUSION

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

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission:

1. Open the Public Hearing;
2. Take public testimony;
3. Discuss the issues;
4. Close the Public Hearing; and
5. Adopt Resolution No. PA-260013, approving the project.

Attachments

- A. Resolution No. PA-260013*
- B. Project Plans*
- C. Neighbor Signatures*
- D. Correspondence*
- E. Silhouette Certification*
- F. Neighborhood Statistics*