

Pre-Planning Application Report

for 727 Hanover Street, Santa Cruz, CA

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Executive Summary

The 12 unit development proposed at 727 Hanover Street, Santa Cruz, is well suited to both the lot and the neighborhood. Although it is mostly a single-family home area, several other similar medium-density multi-family lots have been developed recently. This project will not have to be the first ones facing community opposition, and can lean on reports and research done by other developers instead of forging a fresh path. This project is also small enough in scope to likely not need a full Environmental Impact Report, but there is a possibility of mitigations on the Negative Declaration around issues of water runoff and pending discussions with the Native Oholone peoples whose land it is.

Based on Santa Cruz's proposed zoning map for their 2030 General Plan update, the location for this development is outside the Coastal Zone and will be zoned for higher-density residential than is currently proposed in this project. This latter zoning change is likely the most significant - clearly the city is planning for more development to happen in this area, even if neighbors oppose current projects. Other potential points of opposition from the public include the demolition of the house and the removal of the two smaller but still substantial trees on the site. The former can be alleviated in any of a few ways mentioned in the report. The latter would require further discussion with the developer, and possible adjustment to the plan.

After satisfactorily addressing the points of water runoff handling, the outcome of conversations with the local Oholone peoples, and whether anyone feels particularly strongly about the house and trees, this project will be a great addition to the community.

1. Project Setting

1.1. Site

727 Hanover Street is a 0.48 acre lot, just shy of 21,000 square feet, nearly square in shape due to the right of way on the east side of the lot connecting Hanover Street to Gault Street. This also makes it effectively a corner lot - constrained not by neighboring properties but by two rights-of-way on the east and south sides. The western neighbors are a new-looking multi-building property, so are unlikely to sell; the library to the north is also unlikely to change in the near future. It is likely that this lot will stay the same size and dimensions. This lot also contains the largest privately-owned green space in the area, possibly a function of it being an original 1870s lot with an 1890s house on it.

There are currently four old trees on the lot, two of which the developer proposes to remove. All existing buildings will be demolished.

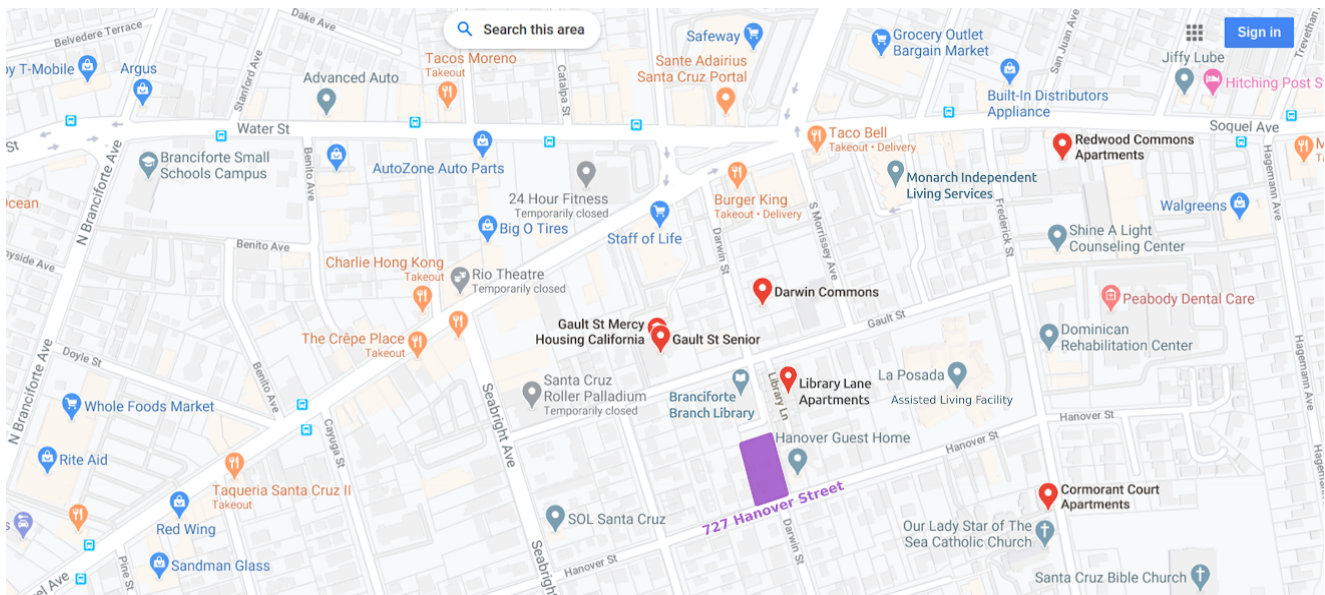


1.2. Location

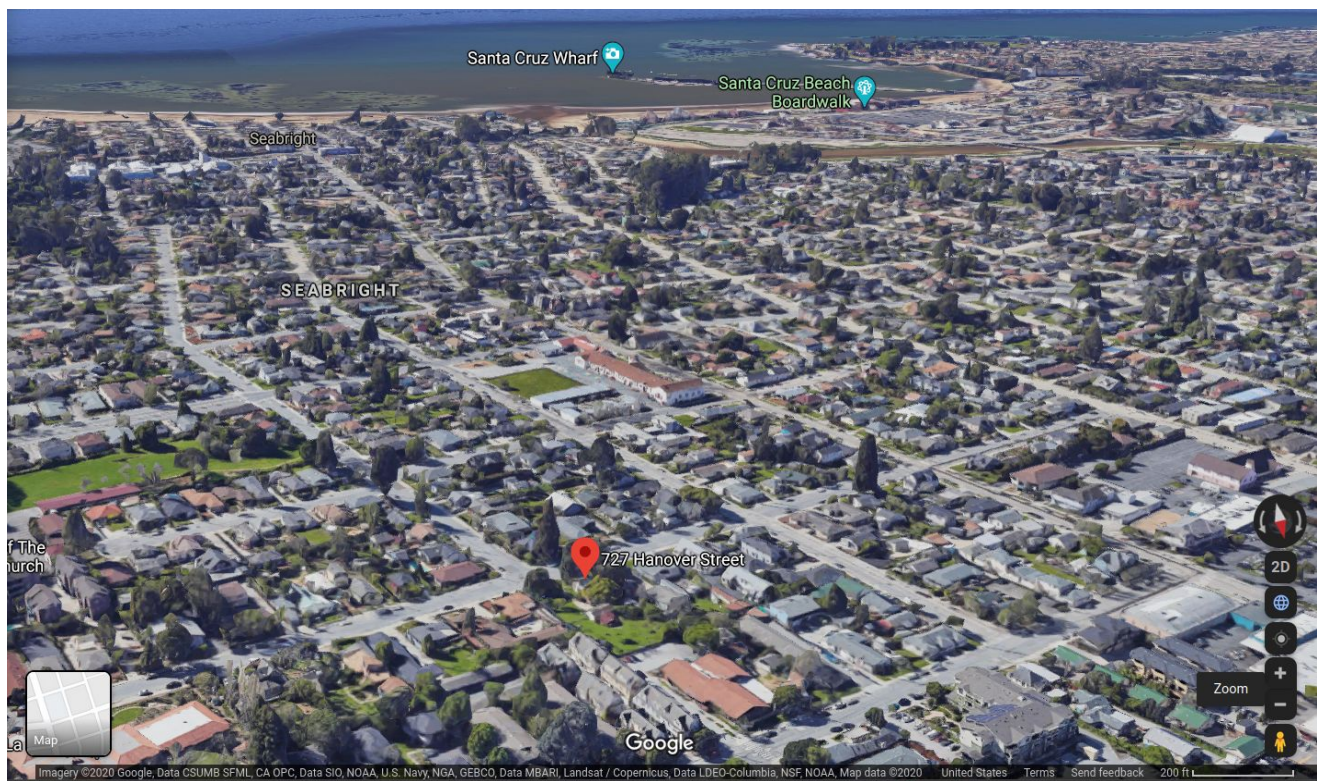
An easy 20 minute walk from Seabright Beach, two blocks from restaurants and retail on Soquel Ave, and backing up to the Branciforte Branch Library, 727 Hanover Street is an ideal location for development. The next block over contains an assisted living center, and there are several other medium-density condo-style developments that seem to have gone up recently nearby.

¹ Image from Zillow listing :

https://www.zillow.com/homes/727-Hanover-St-Santa-Cruz,-CA,-95062_rb/16112760_zpid/



Edits by author to highlight the property in question, and other local developments.
 Additional icons : [map pin by Alex Muravey](#) and [open book by iconesia](#) from the Noun Project.



² Google Maps [search for "apartments" near 727 Hanover]. Retrieved 2020-05-01 from <https://goo.gl/maps/kciwQvdKwZqyVcM59>.

³ Google Maps, 3D view. Retrieved 2020-04-24 from <https://goo.gl/maps/zVEYzWqLsWdFsYEC6>.

1.3. Neighborhood

The immediate area to 727 Hanover Street consists mostly of older single-story homes, though many of them seem to be multi-unit buildings. Based on Google Maps Street View, it seems to be a lovely community space with many families with children (judging by car types), several schools and churches nearby, and the library. There are also a number of new-looking multi-unit developments within a short walk; this project seems like it would be one of the smaller ones.



2. CEQA Compliance

I think the most useful thing would be to look at what Library Lane and other recent similar developments have done for CEQA compliance. If those projects required EIRs, reading through them would give the Hanover Street developers a better idea of what would need to be addressed for their project. If Negative Declarations were prepared, understanding the grounds for those would also be important, as would any mitigations that were imposed.

Without looking at those documents, I would suggest preparing information about the change in traffic volume and flow as well as noise and dust abatement options for the demolition projects. With several schools and a senior living center nearby, I can see these as strong points of contention for the neighborhood. If no traffic study has been done preemptively, it would be an easy method for the neighborhood to stall the project. However, considering that several other larger townhome/condo complexes look to have been built recently, I would guess that opposition on traffic impact grounds would be easy to dispel.

⁴ Google Maps, Street View. Retrieved 2020-05-01 from <https://goo.gl/maps/HLCVrKvr74uoeDsF7>.

Based on my evaluation of the Appendix G checklist, the biggest outstanding questions I have about this project are about any contact that has been made with the local Native and Indigenous peoples. According to <https://native-land.ca/> Santa Cruz is within the larger Ohlone territory; the local branch seems to be the [Amah Mutsun tribal band](#). Although this website appears to be out of date and inactive, it is still important to make all possible efforts to contact these people to understand if there is any particular importance to this parcel of land for them. Contributing to their land trust fund would also be a good way to begin to offset the centuries of displacement and genocide that has been directed against Native Californians.

The next major issue I would want to see addressed would be water handling - both fresh and runoff. The issue with pavement is that it prevents water that falls from soaking into the soil. Instead, it's funneled into channels that move faster and faster with more added water, and with added speed comes increased erosion. Either permeable pavement that allows water to enter back into the water table somewhat naturally, or catchment systems that slow the flow, will help ease these issues. There doesn't seem to be garden space for the residents, but one way to help with this is to provide rain barrels to catch roof runoff for gardening uses. It could be stored for watering the common spaces which will include at least two large trees. These trees are used to getting the natural water cycle, since there is not a lot of pavement on the property right now. In order to prevent them from becoming hazards, it's important to allow them to continue receiving the same speed and volume of water that they're used to.

In light of other possible issues, these seem relatively minor in the permitting process. It is unlikely that a full EIR would need to be prepared for this development. A Negative Declaration, possibly with mitigations, would be sufficient.

3. Subdivision

The developer will be subdividing this plot, and selling the housing as individual condos. This means that a Subdivision Map is needed, which will need to be approved by the director of planning and community development, and the city council. If the developer were going to sell the property as a single lot, this wouldn't need to be done. However, if the buyer were going to sell or lease out the properties, they would need to go through this process.

Since there will be more than four individual lots on this property, the maps will go through the full process with the city council. This includes the preparation of preliminary, tentative, and final maps. The preliminary map will be with the director of planning and community development for a maximum of 21 days for approval.

Once that is received a tentative map with a soil report, subdivision report, seismic safety report, CEQA report (as needed), utility certification, and any other reports "deemed necessary" by the director of planning and community development will be prepared and submitted back to the director of planning and community development for another 30 day review process. Within 10 days of submitting that tentative map, local school districts that enclose the property under development also need to be notified of the development. They have 20 days to file a report with the director of planning and community development about the project.

This tentative map will be reviewed in a public zoning board / city council hearing. If the tentative map is approved at this meeting, that approval will be valid for 36 months to allow sufficient time to prepare the final map, with full detail and reports about the project. This final map is also subject to a public city council meeting approval, which will follow about 10 days after it is submitted to the city clerk.

4. Development Standards

4.1. Setbacks

Although the setback standards are complicated, they are even more so if this is considered a corner lot, due to the right-of-way along the eastern border of the property. Because it is simply a footpath, and for the simplicity of this report, I am assuming that we are not working with a corner lot.

The five-foot minimum side yard has been preserved all along this length, as well as on the west border of the property. The front and rear yards also are greater than the minimum 15 and 10 foot setbacks, respectively, as well as providing additional square footage of open common spaces. Other side yard setback changes are addressed in the Density Bonus section.

4.2. Parking

One parking space per unit is the minimum allowable for this type of project, and is what the developer has proposed. There is no requirement for providing at least one covered/garage space per unit, since this is a townhome/condo project. There is, however, a provision for Electric Vehicle charging spaces. Because the total number of actual parking spaces is 21, there needs to be one EV charging station. This will need to be included in the plans, so cannot wait to know which buyer first asks for one. Ideally, they would be provided for each unit, to lower the to EV ownership to all buyers of these condos.

4.3. Design

A design permit is required for proposed developments of three or more units, which does apply to this project of 12 units. The design section includes elements for trash and utility enclosures, the effect of neighboring different land uses (in this case, the library branch to the north), maintaining significant trees, minimizing the impact on local traffic, encouraging alternatives to personal car travel, orienting the new buildings to take advantage of natural sun and wind exposure for heating or cooling, and water usage. Whether this project is in harmony with the neighborhood will be addressed in a later section.

Having addressed the last one in the section on CEQA compliance, I would like to focus on trees and alternative travel methods for this section. Based on the pre-application plan, only two of the four existing trees are to be kept. One is being removed to allow for "Fire Apparatus clearances" - I would like to know more about whether this is a vertical or horizontal clearance. If vertical, is there no way that the tree could be trimmed instead of completely removed? A 30-inch diameter tree has been there for a very long time, and is not just a decorative item but a host to a whole ecosystem. The timing of the removal of the tree will also be critical; consultation with local wildlife services to understand when birds are least likely to be using it for nesting is critical. The other tree to be removed is the smallest of the four, at only 24 inches in diameter. However, there is no note about why it is being removed, so perhaps the developers should strongly consider leaving it. Being on the south side of the building, it will provide needed shade in the summer from the constant sun exposure to that side of the building, thereby reducing the need for the resident of that unit to run the air conditioning.

While car parking and storage spaces are clearly laid out in these plans, there does not seem to be any space set aside for bicycle parking. The garages are quite small, and do not necessarily easily accommodate moving a bicycle around a car parked in there. It would be great to see some sort of communal, covered, secured bike parking both as a way to encourage visitors to arrive by bicycle as well as fostering a sense of community and shared resources among the residents. There is ample space for something small in the common space, not visible from the street, between units 1/2/3 and unit 4. It is already under the shade of the large tree, so a simple roofed structure would suffice. When bicycle facilities are available and easy to access, more people use them. With so many resources, from shopping to the sea, within an easy ride across level terrain it seems an obvious addition and potential draw for individual buyers.

4.4. Density Bonus

As a Medium-Density Residential zone, this project is allowed a density of 20.1 to 30 dwelling units per acre. This lot is 0.48 acres, so the allowable number of units on this space is 10 (9.6) to 14 (14.4); the proposed 12 units is within the allowable density for the zone. Because two of these are the density bonus units, they are not factored into the calculation of the initial density bonus.

The base number of 10 units would result in one density bonus unit at the baseline of 10%. The developer has chosen to build two units that will be affordable to lower-income households, putting them at a density bonus of 20%. This 20% affords them two incentives or concessions, as well as a bonus-bonus of 1.5% increase for each percentage over 10% because they have been identified as units for "lower-income households." The total density bonus for this project is the maximum of 35%.

They are taking these in the form of a concession regarding the side yard setback on unit 1/2/3 - the current plan has eliminated 14 inches from the side yard setback of the other units along the western property line in order to keep the two largest trees on the property. For a trade off of a 14 inch strip along a wall just shy of 20 feet long, this seems like a very valid concession to make. There is still a five-foot-two-inch setback from the property line. This adjustment will still require a Financial Pro Forma, though, because it is greater than a 20% reduction in side yard setback.

The other request, the waiver for reduced parking size requirements on the one-bedroom units, is harder to track down. There is a brief mention of "standard size parking" in the Off-Street Parking and Loading Facilities section, but it is not explicitly spelled out in any of the parking requirement tables. It seems a reasonable precaution, though, to request the size change waiver for these compact spaces.

The calculations above are the same as what is listed in the pre-application document, and I believe them to be correct. I also agree with their decision to not try to squeeze two more units onto the property to make full use of the allowable four bonus density units. Other than reconfiguring Unit 4 to be the same as Unit 1/2/3, which would mean converting Unit 4 from Type B to Type A, I don't know where the other two units could easily go.

4.5. Design/Landscaping

While it is not the most attractive design, it seems to be the best use of the space given the layout and height constraints. I always feel that there are never enough windows in modern houses, but I also understand not wanting the neighbors at 723 Hanover to feel like they're constantly being watched. The use of the second-floor balcony over the garage entrance is also nice, giving both an outdoor space and a covered access to the house.

My initial feeling was that this would not be in keeping with the neighborhood. Looking at the single-family homes opposite, that would be true. But next door at 705 Hanover is another multi-family development that looks fairly recent, and 813 Hanover is an assisted living facility. Behind are the Library Lane townhomes, and there are many other similar developments nearby. Clearly, this is the direction this neighborhood is moving. With its nearby schools and restaurants, and an easy walk (or easier bike ride!) to the beach, I can understand why more and more people are wanting to live in this neighborhood. Single family homes are not a good use of space in an area like this, especially with rent so high all across California.

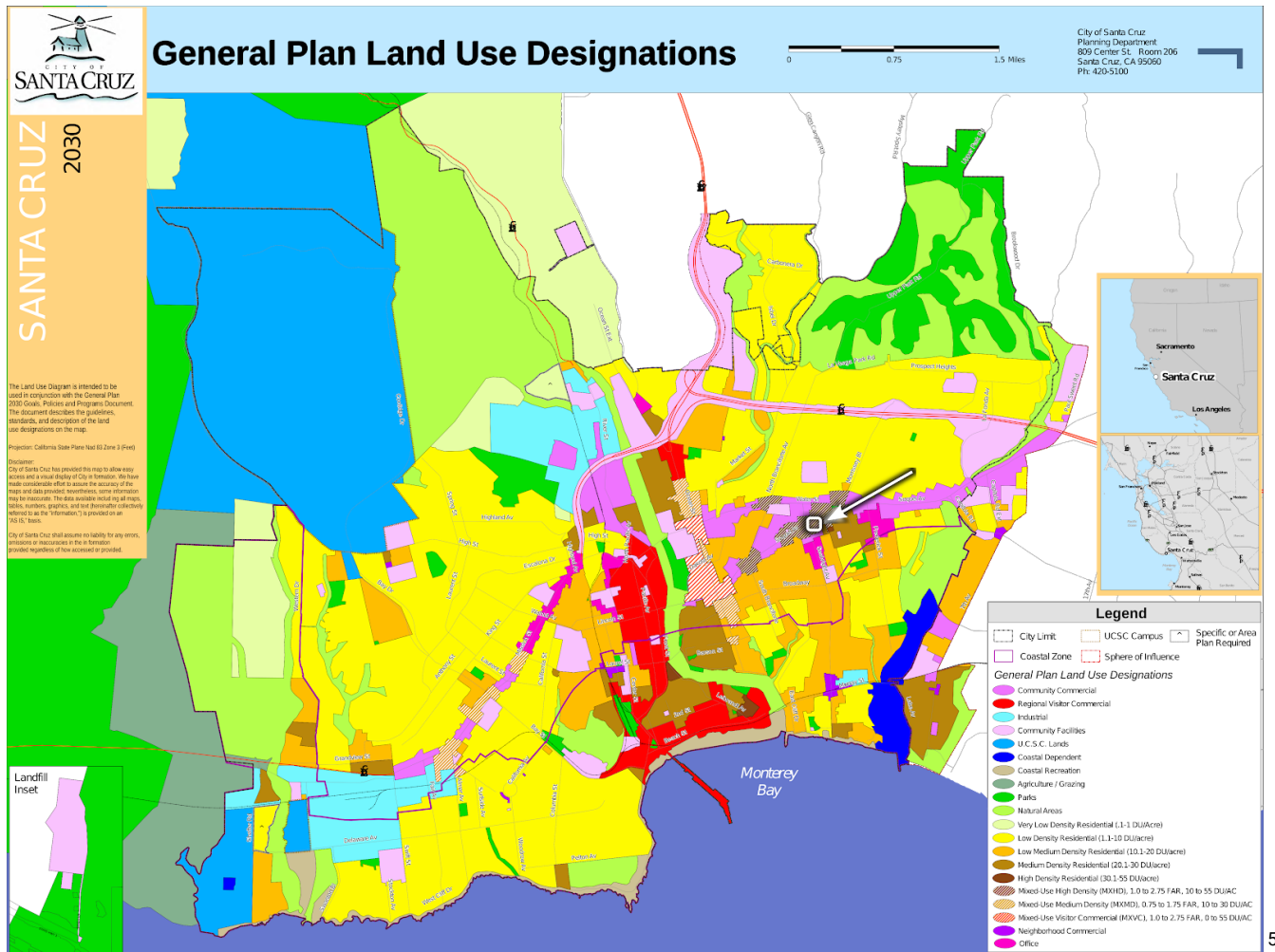
It is hard to say what is "in harmony" with a neighborhood in flux. While many long-time residents will likely resist any change that doesn't look like their houses, it's clear that multi-family units are becoming more the norm. What will be interesting to see is if this project will be primarily owner-occupied, or if there is a high turnover of renters. That will greatly determine its effect on the neighborhood - obviously a more stable population will be more tied into the local community.

The biggest change will be the loss of the trees. They are some of the taller ones in the area. Although the two largest are to be saved, which is wonderful, I would strongly encourage the developer to look into what it would take to keep the other one at the front of the property. It not only helps shade the south side of the building, but it also provides privacy from the street for the individuals who end up living in that front unit. Having a tree there also helps hide the line of condos from the neighbors, so leaving it up might also make them more amenable to the project.

5. Other Permits

5.1. Coastal Development

As shown in the map below, this area is outside the Coastal Zone and does not require coastal permits. The location of 727 Hanover is marked with a white square indicated by an arrow.



5.2. Demolition

Since all the structures currently on the property are to be taken down, various demolition permits may be needed. Assuming the outbuildings are less than 50 years old, though, they do not need special permits for demolition. However, before the house can be demolished, there needs to be an ad circulated in the local newspaper offering it to any member of the public.

⁵ City of Santa Cruz. *General Plan and Local Coastal Program Land Use Map*. Retrieved 2020-04-27 from <http://www.cityofsantacruz.com/government/city-departments/planning-and-community-development/long-range-policy-planning/general-plan>.

Two ads, two weeks apart, must be approved by the city zoning administrator, and must be open for 60 days. Anyone who responds to the ad must be able to remove the house from the property within 90 days from the first ad unless the developer and that person agree otherwise. This offer only applies to the residence.

6. Opposition

6.1. Traffic

As mentioned above in the CEQA section, the presence of other recent townhome/condo projects will likely provide a good ground for defending the lack of traffic impact. Reviewing the steps that those projects took, along with the opposition they may have faced, would be a good way to head off those discussions early in the process. I would focus particularly on Library Lane, behind 727, and Redwood Commons Apartments on Frederick Street. The former is more on the scale of this current project, and is kitty-corner to the northeast. Their access is along Gault Street, which seems to be less residential than Hanover, so not all of the opposition will be the same.

Redwood Commons is a much larger scale project, and will likely have had to do an EIR due to traffic impacts. There are access drives on both Frederick Street and Soquel Avenue that lead into (but not through) the apartments there. This is an awkward corner behind a gas station, but there is a bus stop just at the driveway onto Soquel. Neither Library Lane nor 727 Hanover have direct bus access. I would be curious to know how many of those residents own a car, how many use the bus that's available, how many bike, etc.

6.2. Historic Preservation

If neighbors or family of the house are interested in preserving it, the easiest route would be to work with the City of Santa Cruz Historical Society to get it designated as "historic." This does not ensure that it will be preserved, but makes it much more difficult to simply demolish. I certainly wouldn't blame anyone who wanted to save it - it looks like a well-loved and happy home even when empty. Once the historic designation is applied, it is possible that more options (and funding!) for moving it to a new location would be available.

Even without the historic designation, though, there is still an option for someone to save the house. The ad circulated before the demolition allows for any member of the public to work with the developer to remove the house from the property. If someone were motivated enough to raise the funds to do it, the house could continue to be full of life.

7. Recommendation

Although this developer does not need to have a full EIR done, it would be useful to read ones that have been prepared for other local developments. This research would provide valuable insight into both the local ecology and any other potential challenges from neighbors. Despite this being a smaller project than others that appear to have been recently built nearby, Santa Cruz is notorious for being a city of individuals who are heavily invested in their neighborhoods. I would not expect opposition to this project at 727 Hanover to be insurmountable, but it is always useful to understand the history instead of just repeating it.

That adage also very much applies to how to work with the Native Ohlone peoples of the area, who are the original stewards of the land. Instead of repeating the history of assuming that our progress is the best progress, we can attempt to right some of the wrongs perpetrated against Native and Indigenous communities across the country by forging meaningful relationships around land use planning. While these conversations are not required by law, it would be a first step and a way to set a good example for others.

Based on the above evaluation of this project with its minimal potential impact on traffic, addition of affordable housing units for lower-income buyers, preservation of at least half the old trees, and design that is in harmony with both the existing neighborhood and the direction that the City of Santa Cruz is planning, this project and the density bonus should be approved. Any outstanding issues are easily handled in a Mitigated Negative Declaration, which I believe is all that is needed for this project.