



City of Sierra Madre

Office of the City Clerk

232 W. Sierra Madre Blvd.,

Sierra Madre, CA

(626) 355-7135

THE BROWN ACT PROVIDES THE PUBLIC WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE PUBLIC COMMENTS AT ANY PUBLIC MEETING.

THE FOLLOWING WRITTEN COMMENTS WERE RECEIVED IN ADVANCE OF THIS MEETING AND WILL BE POSTED ONTO THE CITY'S WEBSITE FOR PUBLIC ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY. ANY ATTACHMENTS TO THE E-MAILS MAY BE PUBLICLY INSPECTED BY CONTACTING THE CITY CLERK OFFICE DURING NORMAL BUSINESS HOURS.

THE COMMENTS ATTACHED ARE SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC. THE CITY DOES NOT CONFIRM THE VERACITY OF THE STATEMENTS PROVIDED BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.

Joshua Wolf

From: Christine Bello
Sent: Thursday, June 5, 2025 10:27 AM
To: Public Comment
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment for 6/5/2025 Planning Meeting

CAUTION: This message is from an EXTERNAL SENDER - be CAUTIOUS, particularly with links and attachments.

Good morning,

My name is Christine Bello and I reside at 109 S Baldwin Avenue in Sierra Madre, and I would like to express my concerns regarding the proposed project for 123 S Baldwin Avenue in Sierra Madre.

The applicant is requesting a variance to build on parcels that are smaller than those typically required under the Sierra Madre Municipal Code. Granting this variance could set a precedent for future developments that may not align with the city's zoning regulations. This address is on the main road leading to our beautiful downtown, frequented by residents and out-of-town visitors; the construction of four, two-story condominiums on such small parcels could disrupt the visual harmony of the street, altering the aesthetic appeal that defines this part of Sierra Madre.

While the area is zoned for this level of development, the effects of this project will not alter this property alone; the high-density residential housing will disrupt the flow of the neighboring homes as well. The historical style is reflected with each property south of 123 S Baldwin Ave, and the distance from the sidewalk is fairly consistent. Even if the architectural symmetry is accounted for in the new construction, the property will have a noticeable disunity with the surrounding area.

My key grievance is with the proposed variance and the conditional use permit for the property, but these requests come with other consequences. It will not simply be the units seen from the curb, but the impact will be in the number of cars on the property and the street; noise from the increase in residents on the lot; and the potential for long time residents to move away from our area, leading the way for more development and changes to infrastructure.

I appreciate the Planning Commission's commitment to preserving the character and integrity of Sierra Madre. I respectfully request that the Commission consider the concerns raised above and ensure that any approval of the proposed development aligns with the city's zoning laws, historic preservation standards, and the overall well-being of the community.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Christine Bello

109 S Baldwin Ave
Sierra Madre, CA 91024

Joseph Bontrager
123 South Baldwin Ave.
Sierra Madre, Ca., 91024

6/5/2025
Planning Department
City of Sierra Madre,
Sierra Madre, Ca., 91024

Re Approval of 123 S Baldwin Project,

Dear Planning Department,

My family and I was recently devastated by loss of our home in the Altadena fires. The shock and loss are hard to explain and the need to secure your family is a safe comfortable environment becomes paramount in your wishes. We were fortunate enough to meet, Glenn Weissman, who had just finished a remodel of a Craftsmen Home built around the turn of the century. His plan was to sell the remolded home and move on to another project. He saw our need for a residence and offered us the opportunity to rent this newly refurbished home. We jumped at the opportunity.

What we have seen is the home has been exceptional, all the systems inside the home have been updated. All electrical, plumbing, HVAC and gas lines have been replaced with new required standards. The light fixture, sinks, flooring countertops and walls have been upgraded to new products. The appliances are new, and a new roof has been added. From the outside the exterior of the home has been painted, stained, masonry elements replaced where needed. The house from the historical perspective has been total restore to it original beauty. The front porch is also a wonderful place to watch the sun set.

Glenn recently showed us the plans and site work for the project consideration; we loved the additional homes that are being requested for approval. I would like to give my acceptance and support for the approval of this project. I would like to be first in line to purchase one of the new homes as we would like to have my family remain in the Sierra Madre Community.

Sincerely,

Joseph Bontrager

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Bontrager', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

From: Cintia Runha
Sent: Thursday, June 5, 2025 10:15 AM
To: Public Comment
Cc: Onnie Williams III
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Hearing Comments: 123 S Baldwin Ave Project

CAUTION: This message is from an EXTERNAL SENDER - be CAUTIOUS, particularly with links and attachments.

Hello City of Sierra Madre Planning Commission,

We're the owners of the neighboring property: 139 S Baldwin Ave, Sierra Madre, CA 91024.

Please see below our comments related to the project on property: 123 S Baldwin Ave, Sierra Madre, CA 91024.

We are writing to strongly oppose the proposed development of four new condominium units at 123 S. Baldwin Avenue (Agenda Item for June 5, 2025). This project violates several critical provisions of the Sierra Madre Municipal Code and undermines the character of our historic and residential community.

- 1. Nonconformance with Zoning Standards:** The applicant is requesting variances for minimum lot dimensions, lot area, and dwelling unit density that are far below what the R-3-13 zoning requires. Lots A, B, and C are each significantly under the 12,600 square foot minimum, and the proposed density exceeds what is allowed for Tier 1 parcels. Granting such broad variances sets a dangerous precedent and diminishes the purpose of zoning laws meant to ensure orderly and equitable development.
- 2. Incompatibility with Historic Landmark Site:** The Twycross House is a designated historic landmark, and this proposal places four modern two-story units around it, fundamentally altering the site's appearance and context. Despite staff claims of compatibility, the surrounding development will visually dominate and erode the historic setting. The certificate of appropriateness should be denied on these grounds.
- 3. Circumvention of Code via Variance Abuse:** The application avoids the City's prohibition on converting pre-1927 structures to condominiums by reshaping lot lines to preserve the Twycross House as a standalone parcel. This maneuver forces multiple variances and results in lots that do not meet width, depth, or size requirements. This use of variances appears to circumvent, rather than comply with, the City's land use policies.
- 4. Negative Impacts to Neighborhood Character:** The proposed density, height, and massing of the new units are incompatible with the existing streetscape properties. The project introduces excessive bulk and density into a historically low-scale, low-density residential area, impacting views, privacy, and the unique charm of our community. The setback on the front of the property is completely misaligned when compared to all neighboring properties as stated in the historian report and shown in the pictures. Specifically, the porch is only 11 feet from the sidewalk.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Planning Commission to deny the application and uphold the development standards that protect the integrity of our neighborhoods and historic resources. We believe in more affordable housing and developments that comply with state and municipal ordinances to achieve that and will happily support a proposal that is more aligned with the Sierra Madre Municipal Code. If this project

moves forward as is, know that every person driving up to our beautiful Sierra Madre village will wonder “Who approved this non-confirming and uncharacteristic structure?”

Sincerely,

Cintia Runha & Onnie Williams

From: SS S
Sent: Thursday, June 5, 2025 2:58 PM
To: Public Comment; Public Comment;
Subject: [EXTERNAL] 123 Baldwin Comments for Hearing

CAUTION: This message is from an EXTERNAL SENDER - be CAUTIOUS, particularly with links and attachments.

Name:

Sharif Sawires
Berkeley CA.

Disclosure:

I entered escrow on the 123 Baldwin property with the intent to restore. The escrow was terminated. At request, I am happy to explain or provide additional detail to any City staff

Comments (2)

Comment 1: Variance and Architectural Modifications to Original Design

This Project requires a Zoning Variance from Minimum Lot Dimension/Size and Maximum number of Dwelling units. The developer/applicant has “elected not to consolidate the three parcels but instead intends to conform to the ongoing preservation of the Twycross House.”

The reasoning appears disingenuous. If the City should not allow exemptions under the protection of “preservation.” An appropriate legal/governing instrument should be used if an exception is to be granted by the City.

Extensive modifications have been made to the original internal design and architecture of the Twycross home by the developer. We were unable to obtain these City issues permits, and City approved plans, prior to the extensive modification. As of January 2025 of this year, the City notified me the plans were not yet publicly available, citing vendor delays.

- 1) Upstairs master bathroom was added that reduces the master bedroom by approximately 25-30% and changes the original architecture and design of the main bedroom. No permit or City approved plans were made publicly available prior to this work.
- 2) Bathroom added between the two downstairs bedrooms where no bathroom existed previously. This has significantly modified the original design and architecture. No permit or City approved plans were made publicly available prior to this work.
- 3) The original bathrooms were separated by a single wall. That wall was removed to create one contiguous bathroom. No permit or City approved plans were made publicly available prior to this work.
- 4) A wall between the kitchen and foyer was removed. I believe this to be a load bearing wall. No permit or City approved plans were made publicly available prior to this work. This wall may have required engineering or structural calculations.

- 5) The application proposes the modification of the Twycross home by adding an attached 2-car garage.

Comment 2: Environmental Impact on Twycross Home / Vehicular Accommodations

The developer's plan calls for construction of 4 "above moderate income level affordability." These 4 units each include a 2-car garage. Additionally, the developer proposes adding an attached 2-car garage Twycross home.

This plan would allow for 10 vehicles on the original Twycross parcels.

Two easements/driveways are planned to accommodate these vehicles.

On the Southern side of the Twycross parcels, up to 4 vehicles would share one driveway/easement

*Importantly, the driveway/easement on the Northern side, the driveway that would service the original Twycross home, would need to allow passage of up to 6 vehicles.

This density of vehicular egress/ingress seems on its surface inconsistent with the preservation exemptions (or spirit of preservation) that the applicant requests.

Comment Summary:

The exemptions the applicant seeks are inconsistent with the preservation of a Historical Landmark deemed of significance to culture and character of the City. While increasing housing availability is a legitimate concern of many residents, this appears to be a disingenuous argument by the applicant. The fact that construction was allowed to modify this Historical Landmark prior to plans being made publicly available is unfortunate. The level of scrutiny required of monuments that residents, the City and County deem of special significance, should be held to a higher standard. We would no more re-purpose public parks, cemeteries or environmentally sensitive areas without transparent public notice of the changes and impact on the residents as well as a higher standard of scrutiny. I am not opposed to the City's decisions, if they are made in good faith and in conjunction with the residents. I do not believe the residents have had sufficient input, nor have they been made sufficiently aware of the significant alterations to the Twycross Landmark prior to initiation of the work. While I do not have a durable remedy, I suggest at the very least, the changes made to the internal architecture should be made publicly available photograph and original design documents/drawings.

Again, I am not opposed to the City's decisions, nor am I opposed to the owner's right to develop. Simply the appropriate notice, public review, and appropriate instruments for exceptions / variances.

From: Jeremy Stacey
Sent: Thursday, June 5, 2025 1:55 PM
To: Public Comment
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment for Hearing of Twycross House at 123 S. Baldwin Avenue

CAUTION: This message is from an EXTERNAL SENDER - be CAUTIOUS, particularly with links and attachments.

The proposed project to construct four new condominium units around the historic Twycross House at 123 S. Baldwin Avenue should be **denied** by the Planning Commission for the following legal, planning, and environmental reasons:

1. Non-Compliance with Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

This packet states that "The proposed project was reviewed by a qualified architectural historian and found to be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties."

However, section 9 of the standards for Rehabilitation state: "9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and *spatial relationships* that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, *size, scale and proportion, and massing* to protect the integrity of the property and its environment." **The Twycross House was originally built on a large, open residential lot, consistent with early 20th century homes in Sierra Madre, with space on all sides, including significant side setbacks that were likely part of its visual prominence and residential feel. By constructing two-story structures on either side of the historic house, the proposal fundamentally alters the spatial relationships that define the setting of the historic landmark. The house will now appear crammed between new buildings, losing its visual and architectural separation. This encroachment violates Standard 9, which is meant to preserve the historic character and integrity of a property's environment, not just the structure itself.**

Furthermore, section 2 of the Interiors Standards for Rehabilitation state: "2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided." **Placing a new garage tightly against the rear of the Twycross House fundamentally alters the historic spatial relationship between the house and its surrounding open space. As mentioned, Standard 2 of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards requires that these kinds of spatial relationships, not just materials, be preserved. In early 20th-century residential design, detached garages were deliberately placed at a distance from the main home, often near the rear corners of the lot. By building this new garage close to the house, the project removes a key spatial feature that defines the character of the site - its openness and setback. This undermines the historic character of the home.**

This packet claims "the removal of a non-original detached garage will not impact the integrity or character of the landmark.", but provides **no supporting evidence**. There's no historian's report, no construction date, no explanation of the reasoning. That makes it impossible for the public or the Planning Commission to verify the claim. There are ariel photographs of the house provided by the UCSB Library showing a garage at that location, the earliest being 1928. The garage may actually be original or contributing. Until we see the historian's report and clear evidence that this structure lacks historic integrity, **the demolition should not be approved**. This is a key part of the property's historic character, and removing it without documented justification may violate Standards 2 and 5 of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards exist to protect the integrity of historic places, not to be selectively cited and loosely interpreted. In this case, there's no public report included from the historian, no explanation of how key features like the garage or the property's open space were evaluated. If these standards are being used to waive environmental review and greenlight demolition and dense new construction on a designated landmark site, then the public deserves a transparent and credible process. Without documentation or real scrutiny, how can anyone say with confidence that this project actually meets the standards? It calls the entire review process into question.

2. Violations of Zoning Code - Lot Size, Width, and Depth Requirements

The proposed project violates **Sierra Madre Municipal Code §17.28.030(B)(1)** which mandates:

"Every lot in the R-3-13 zone...shall have ninety feet in width, one hundred forty feet in depth, and twelve thousand six hundred square feet in area."

All three parcels (Lots A, B, and C) are **noncompliant on all three counts**-none meet the minimum requirements for width, depth, or square footage. Even after reconfiguration, the proposed lots still do not comply. This level of nonconformance directly conflicts with the intent and letter of the zoning code. Moreover, the Planning Department is requesting **multiple variances** to legalize these nonconforming lots, which leads to the next issue.

3. Improper Use of Variances - Special Privilege

Under **California Government Code §65906** and **SMMC §17.60.010**, a variance can be granted **only if** the following condition is met:

"The variance does not constitute a grant of special privilege inconsistent with the limitations upon other properties in the vicinity and zone."

Here, the only reason variances are being requested is because the developer is choosing **not** to consolidate the lots due to an existing prohibition in **SMMC §16.36.050**, which bars converting pre-1927 structures into condominiums. This prohibition is not a hardship unique to this property-it applies to all properties with pre-1927 structures in the city.

Approving these variances rewards a developer for designing around known restrictions rather than adhering to the City's planning principles. This sets a **dangerous precedent** that undermines the integrity of the zoning code and opens the door for other developers to seek relief simply by citing self-imposed difficulties.

4. Incompatibility With CEQA - Misapplication of Historical Exemption

This is proposing a **Class 31 Categorical Exemption** under **CEQA Guidelines §15331** (Historical Resource Restoration/Rehabilitation) based on an architectural historian's review.

However, **CEQA Guidelines §15300.2(f)** clearly states that a project **cannot** use a categorical exemption if:

"...the project may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource."

This project places **four modern buildings** directly around the Twycross House, physically crowding it on all sides and significantly altering the context, visibility, and prominence of the historic structure. One of the new buildings (DU-2) will sit **in front of the historic house**, projecting it back behind a wall of new development. This contradicts the intent of preservation and **changes the appearance from public view**, violating **SMMC §17.82.090** and triggering CEQA review.

5. Incompatibility With Neighborhood Character

The City's General Plan calls for: "Preservation of Sierra Madre's unique small-town character and historic resources."

The development surrounds a historic house with modern, dense construction and narrows the open space around the landmark. The homes will **visually and physically squeeze** the landmark, undermining its historic character. This does **not** meet the goals of the General Plan or the findings required for a **Design Review Permit under SMMC §17.60.041(D)**, which mandates compatibility with neighborhood context and preservation of public views.

6. Inadequate Open Space and Lot Consolidation Gamesmanship

While each unit technically meets **open space requirements**, the **overall lot manipulation** through a non-consolidation strategy appears to be **deliberately structured to sidestep** zoning density restrictions and to maximize units on substandard lots. The entire justification rests on a hypothetical "Lot D" scenario that is **not being pursued**, further showing that the project is inconsistent with **Title 16 subdivision integrity standards** and violates the intent behind **SMMC §16.08.030** and **§16.20.010**.

In conclusion, this project does not simply require minor variances or adjustments-it represents a **complete override of core zoning requirements**, undermines the **visual and cultural integrity** of a registered historic site, and abuses **state and local laws** through manipulated lot configuration and questionable CEQA exemption claims. The Planning Commission should **deny** the entitlements associated with this project and recommend that any future development on this site conform fully to zoning and preservation standards, with proper CEQA review.

Thank you,

Joshua Wolf

From: Steve Lewis
Sent: Thursday, June 5, 2025 4:02 PM
To: Public Comment
Cc: Lewis, Dorothy K; Christine Bello;
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: City Council Meeting info - 123 S. Baldwin Ave.

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Dear Sierra Madre Planning Commission,

Related to the link to the meeting package

<https://meetings.municode.com/d/f?u=https://mccmeetings.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/siermad-pubu/MEET-Packet-cdc65fa9a584ae7bb7cd932bb71ace3.pdf&n=AgendaPacket-Planning%20Commission%20Meeting-June%205.%202025%205.30%20PM.pdf>

The project they are proposing is totally non-conforming. They are asking for a Lot Line Adjustment that is required by law to create compliant parcels. Their staff is then recommending supporting a variance that throws out all requirements in a bid to allow them to develop more residential units. While the City and California in general needs units, we don't need to ruin our historic homes along the primary entrance street to Sierra Madre.

This side of Baldwin along this block has 4 houses built around 1915.

139 S. Baldwin Ave is listed as 1913 per the LA County Assessor. 169 S. Baldwin Ave is listed as 1915 the same year as Twycross and the property predates the Twycross subdivision along with 171 S. Baldwin Ave which is listed as 1912.

The remaining 3 houses on this block frontage were built later, but all have a similar physical setback. 145 S. Baldwin was built in 1953 and 155 S. Baldwin is listed as 1938 with 109 S. Baldwin listed as 1936.

169 S. Baldwin where I live is 48.9' from outside wall to front right of way line, with a 9 porch leaving approximately 40' clear from structure to the back of sidewalk.

To say that the historic nature of the house is not related to its physical setback to fences the street and adjacent structures is something that doesn't fit with this street and specifically this block.

The backwards house at 40 Lowell is a prime example of how selling off property and developing it can change the nature of a historic home to one where it no longer is presented in the same way as it was intended.

The Twycross house was built in 1915 and the Twycross Tract was recorded in 1918 creating Lots 2, 3 and 4, of which the owners of Twycross decided to create a more substantial estate by retaining ownership of the northerly 28.10' of Lot 4 and the southerly 30' of Lot 2 in addition to Lot 3 where the house stands.

The historic nature of this property is inherently tied to the current physical setback of the neighboring properties. It would be advisable to create a special overlay for this block as 4 of the homes are of a historic nature being constructed prior to 1927 while the other 3 homes are at a consistent distance from the street. The proposed units neither match the historic massing and position of the existing homes, while they will change the framing of the home relative to the street scape and isolate the home from its adjacent massing and it's integration with the neighborhood all of which are part of its historical element.

Their contention is because the existing historic house is historic and built prior to 1927 they are prohibited from doing a condominium project on its land.

Their answer is to make 3 non-compliant lots that if they were to be considered one (which they can't make one because of the statement above) that it would hypothetically allow 5 units per R-3-13. Because that's not actually possible they are supporting the variance on the premise that the postage stamp of a new parcel created around the existing house to be sufficient to protect its historic nature.

Lots created or adjusted are required by code to be 90' wide, 140' deep and 12,000 SF in area.

The existing lots are 139' deep and can't comply, the widths can't comply and the individual lots can't comply.

The hypothetical lot doesn't even comply on depth.

Somehow they contend they will protect all of the 10 oak trees on the site (not that they show them in their exhibit) or the required clear 5' distance from the dripline. Their tree report by their arborist states assumed tree sizes.

They're claiming that this project under a Historical Resource Restoration/Rehabilitation is Categorically Exempt from the CEQA, but no aspect of the historic building is part of the project scope. This project is not a part of or required for Restoration or Rehabilitation. In fact they are claiming that it's association with a historical house makes them exempt from CEQA, while in fact the impact to a historical house is an environmental impact in and of itself.

Steve Lewis, P.E., PLS
Lewis Civil Engineering

Joshua Wolf

From: Steve Lewis
Sent: Thursday, June 5, 2025 4:29 PM
To: Public Comment
Cc: Lewis, Dorothy K; Christine Bello;
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: City Council Meeting info - 123 S. Baldwin Ave.

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I sent the first comments in progress as I wanted to see if I could get the comments in prior to any deadline (which is likely end of day around 5).

Also to note, despite there being a 20' setback, the proposed units should be in line with or behind the existing and match the character of the neighborhood. I'd like to see 40' minimum as a concession for allowing the hypothetical application of concepts and the variance in consideration of the historical nature.

Match 2nd story setback to that of the existing house or exceed it.

Also the R-3-13 allows Tier 1 up to 6,500 SF to have one dwelling unit (and ADUs), which might be more appropriate than the hypothetical application of medium density to a historical property.

The new substandard lots should have a presentation consistent with the neighborhood (mostly single story) and relatively well spaced.

Require parking per code.

Meet 17.28.080 for FAR and Max Building Coverage.

Meet 17.28.08 D for side yard. If you're going to apply the hypothetical lot width of 130' then I'd suggest a side yard setback of 13' or 10% per code. I'd suggest it can't have it both ways.

Steve Lewis, P.E., PLS
Lewis Civil Engineering

From: Steve Lewis
Sent: Thursday, June 5, 2025 4:02 PM
To: publiccomment@sierramadreca.gov
Cc: Lewis, Dorothy K; Christine Bello
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Steve Lewis, P.E., PLS
Lewis Civil Engineering