



## East Slope Design Review Board

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October 13, 2023

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RE: 45 Bronte Street  
Block/Lot #5689/031  
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Dear My My,

The Bernal Heights East Slope Design Review Board held a neighborhood meeting on October 5, 2023 to review drawings dated August 17, 2023 for the proposed remodel and addition to 45 Bronte Street. The meeting was held over Zoom and attended by approximately 14 neighbors.

A number of concerns were discussed at the meeting, and the Board believes that some revisions are necessary to bring the project into conformance with the Bernal Heights East Slope Building Guidelines and/or the San Francisco Planning Code Section 242 Bernal Heights Special Use District:

- Landscaping, Front Yard Setbacks and Street Trees:
  - There is an existing unused tree well in front of the property, though you noted it may be too close to the existing power pole and sidewalk utility vault to allow planting a new tree
  - *Consider a different kind of planting here that could help soften the building's facade, particularly since the proposed front setback is the minimum required by Planning Code*
- Entry Treatment and Fence:
  - The front entry proposes a minor recess that's only the width of the entry door, offering a minimal transition between public and private
  - *Consider ways to make the entry experience more celebratory and less of a hole in the facade, as suggested in the Guidelines; widening the entry recess and stoop, and providing a door sidelight and recessed planter could be one approach*
  - The Guidelines recommend that fences or walls running parallel to a property line fronting a street not be completely solid at eye level, to be more neighborly and less fortress-like
  - *Revise the design of the fence along Mojave Street to comply with Guidelines*
- Building and Architectural Massing:
  - The Board and neighbors share concerns that the design does not comply with the Guidelines' recommendations for bulk and massing that are compatible with and respectful toward the neighborhood
  - The front and side facades are essentially flat, providing in-plane material changes rather than three dimensional volumetric changes; this unfortunately results in the "dressed up box" that the Guidelines seek to discourage
  - At three stories tall, the building is taller than most neighboring homes; even if compliant with height allowed by the Planning Code, it would be visually dominant because of the choice to develop the full width of the property on the first and second levels, and the largely flat blank and uncomposed facade on narrow Mojave Street
  - Neighbors at 39 Bronte, the two-story home downhill, registered a strong concern that their rooftop solar panels would be rendered ineffective by the proposed construction
  - *Provide mass reduction calculations demonstrating compliance with Planning Code Section 242 Bernal Heights Special Use District; note that according to Code, to be counted in the reduced areas, they should have a minimum clearance of 3 feet from the side property lines*

- *Use mass reduction strategies to reduce bulk and massing, and make the apparent scale of the building more compatible with neighboring buildings*
- *Consider adjusting the first floor elevation to reduce the overall height of building; we note that the steep uphill entry into the garage seems awkward and may benefit from being lowered; perhaps the first floor as a whole could be lowered, or at least the garage could be lowered to meet the ground and better reflect the slope of the hill*
- *Perform a solar study as requested by downhill neighbors and collaborate with those neighbors to adjust the design to reduce impacts to their solar panels; consider approaches to minimize blockage of sun to adjacent downhill properties, as stated in the Guidelines*
- Sideyards:
  - Sideyards complying with the Guidelines' diagrams on page 19 have not been provided; the first and second levels extend the full width of the property; sideyards help reduce building bulk by breaking up the solid wall effect on the street, and provide increased opportunities for architectural articulation
  - *Consider how sideyards in combination with mass reduction strategies could make the apparent scale of the building more compatible with neighboring buildings*
  - *We note that nearby mid-century homes on Bronte extend the full width of the property, however they are typically only two stories tall; and while boxy, the facades frequently have two or three separate volumes that break up the massing*
- Facade Elements:
  - As noted in the Guidelines, architectural elements and details can break up the massing of structures and give planar surfaces a three-dimensionality that diminishes the likelihood of monolithic box forms
  - *Consider the elements and examples provided in the Guidelines; opportunities for creating visual interest and reducing the apparent scale of this project include window configuration and composition, bays, porches, decks, roof lines, screens, trellises, etc. to shape and mold the building and increase articulation*
  - *As a corner site, there are two highly visible facades; corner sites provide the additional opportunity, and responsibility, to create buildings that positively contribute to the character of a neighborhood*
  - *When evaluating window placement and size at the Mojave Street facade, look for opportunities to address privacy concerns between this project and the neighbor across this narrow street; offset windows, place solid areas of facade strategically, etc.*
  - *We note that the 3rd floor deck at the front does not comply with the 6' minimum depth recommended by the Guidelines; as this deck is accessed via the walk-in-closet, it seems unlikely to be used; consider changing it to an unoccupied roof and lowering the front parapet*

In addition to these items addressed by the Guidelines and Planning Code, we note the following:

- Ensure space in the garage for the three required trash, recycling and composting bins
- Neighbors at 39 Bronte note that the neglected property is in urgent need of site maintenance for fire safety and sanitation

The Board thanks you for presenting the plans to the neighborhood and invites you to schedule another meeting to review refinements in response to the points enumerated here. Please email us at [bhesdrb@gmail.com](mailto:bhesdrb@gmail.com) to schedule once you have revised the drawings.

Since the Board is not a City agency, it does not have the power to either approve or disapprove the application.

Cordially,



Wendy Cowles, Chair

On Behalf of the Bernal Heights East Slope Design Review Board