



STAFF REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

DATE: Regular Meeting of June 16, 2025

TO: Chair Rubio and members of the Planning Commission

SUBMITTED BY: Timothy Rood, AICP, Community Development Director
Larissa Alchin, Contract Associate Planner

SUBJECT: Design Review Permit (DRP) #25-02 for a major remodel of the existing 2,598 square foot single-family residence and addition of approximately 1,770 square feet of new living space within the Residential Single Family Low Density Zoning District.

APPLICANT: Colleen Mohan of Studio Pranava on behalf of the homeowners

LOCATION: 184 Emerald Way, Hercules, CA 94547
(APN: 407-093-006-2)

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the Planning Commission:

1. Request planning staff present the staff report;
2. Open the public hearing;
3. Invite the applicant to make a presentation or statement;
4. Receive comments from the public;
5. Offer the applicant or their consultant team the opportunity to answer questions;
6. Close the public hearing;
7. Request clarification from staff or the applicant on any issues related to the project; and
8. Adopt a resolution approving Design Review Permit 25-02

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The proposed project at 184 Emerald Way involves a substantial remodel and expansion of an existing 1980s-era single-family home in Hercules. The design aims to modernize the home both aesthetically and functionally, increasing its total size to approximately

4,368 square feet. Located on a 6,489-square-foot parcel within the Residential Single-Family Low Density (RS-L) zoning district, the project includes the addition of a new Primary Suite, a third garage bay, and significant exterior and site upgrades.

The remodel will add approximately 1,770 square feet of new living space and introduce a transition in architectural style—from traditional to modern farmhouse—featuring an optional metal standing seam roof, smooth stucco, and composite wood siding in black and light oak finishes, complemented by black-trimmed windows and doors.

Figure 1: Project Rendering



Site improvements include the installation of permeable concrete pavers in the driveway and rear/side yards to enhance stormwater infiltration, as well as updated landscaping, walkways, and new masonry retaining walls to reinforce grade transitions. The landscape design incorporates planters and front yard enhancements to improve curb appeal while maintaining compatibility with the existing neighborhood context. The home is part of a residential subdivision developed in the early 1980s by Sun Stream Homes. Surrounding properties exhibit a mix of styles, including California Modern Craftsman and suburban Italianate, with common materials such as wood siding, stucco, and varied roofing types. The proposed project seeks to update the home's appearance and expand its functionality while remaining respectful of the neighborhood's architectural diversity (refer to Attachment 2: Design Review Plan Set)

ANALYSIS:

In accordance with Hercules Municipal Code (HMC) Section 13-42.200, design review approval is required prior to the issuance of any permit for the erection, construction, or exterior alteration of any public or private building, fence, structure, or sign. Additions to single-family homes, accessory structures, or fences may be approved by the Community Development Director.

Per HMC Section 13-42.400, the Community Development Director may refer an application for an addition or accessory structure associated with a single-family home to the Planning Commission if it is determined to be of a size, importance, or unique nature that raises significant design considerations. It is the department's practice to refer all second-story additions to the Commission, due to their greater potential for visibility from neighboring homes.

The Community Development Director has determined that the size and design of the proposed addition and remodel of the single-family home at 184 Emerald Way warrants review by the Planning Commission.

Required Design Review Findings

Per HMC Section 13-42.500, the Planning Commission shall make the following findings prior to approving a design review permit:

Finding #1: The approval of the design review permit is in compliance with all provisions of this Chapter, pertinent provisions of Zoning Ordinance and applicable zoning and land use regulations, including but not limited to the Hercules General Plan as amended and any specific plan.

Facts: The subject property is located in the RS-L zoning district, which aligns with the General Plan's RS-L land use designation. The intent of this designation is to accommodate single-family homes on smaller lots within planned subdivisions, typically featuring a variety of home models and architectural styles, and a gross density of 2 to 7 units per acre. The minimum lot size for the RS-L zone is 6,000 square feet unless otherwise modified by a Planned Development (PD); the subject parcel is 6,490 square feet and therefore complies.

The project is consistent with the following Housing Element Goals and Policies:

1. Policy 2.1: Promote the continued maintenance and enhancement of residential units.

The project proposes renovating the 1980s-era home to enhance its architectural style and functionality for current and future residents.

2. Policy 6.2: Ensure all new residential development complies with energy efficiency performance standards of the California Building Standards Code.

The project will comply with all energy efficiency performance standards of the California Building Code.

3. Policy 6.3 Utilize site planning techniques to allow passive energy efficiencies through solar access, landscaping, and building orientation.

Solar panels are proposed in compliance with current building code standards and the project has been designed to minimize shading of adjacent homes.

The project complies with the development regulations presented in HMC Table 13-6.2 as follows:

Table 1: Development Regulation

	Standard	Proposed	Complies
Front Setback	20 ft	20 ft	Yes
Rear Setback	15 ft	20 ft plus	Yes
Side Setback	5 ft	7 ft 10 in	Yes
Side Setback	5 ft	5 ft	Yes
Max. Site Coverage	50%	43.5%	Yes
Max. Building Height	35 ft	33 ft	Yes
Min Parking	2 spaces in garage	3 spaces in garage	Yes

The project complies with HMC Sec. 13-30.610 Fence, Wall, and Hedge Height, as the proposed fences meet the height restrictions. Specifically, no fence or wall in the front setback exceeds 3 feet in height, and fences in the rear and side yards do not exceed 6 feet.

The project complies with HMC Sec. 13-30.750 Paving Within Residential Front, Rear, and Side Yard Areas.

Table 2: Paving Standards

	Standard	Proposed	Complies
Driveway paving	Max. 35% of the total front yard area	44.2% (existing legal non-conforming driveway is 48.8%)	No, see explanation below table
Front Yard Walkways and other Hardscape	Max. 25% of the total front yard area	15.2%	Yes
Front Yard Landscaping	Min. 40% of the total front yard area	40.3%	Yes
Rear & Side Yard Paved Surfaces	Max. 60% of the total rear & side yard area	57.7%	Yes
Rear & Side Yard Landscaping	Min 40% of the total rear & side yard area	42.3%	Yes

Stormwater Runoff Limitation	Max. 47% impermeable surfacing, including all structures	44.7%	Yes
------------------------------	--	-------	-----

Although the proposed replacement driveway exceeds the maximum permitted driveway paving area by approximately 63 square feet, this is due to the addition of a third garage bay, a common feature in the neighborhood. The existing driveway covers approximately 725 square feet, or 48.8% of the front yard area. The driveway pavement predates the adoption of the paving ordinance in 2018 and is therefore considered Legal Nonconforming. By reducing the amount of paving in the front yard and replacing impermeable paving with permeable paving, the project would reduce the extent of the nonconformity. The total front yard paving still complies with HMC Section 13-30.750, which requires that no more than 60% of the front yard be paved, with the remaining 40% reserved for landscaping.

As proposed, the project aligns with the intent and requirements of the Hercules Municipal Code and is consistent with the goals and policies outlined in the General Plan.

Finding #2: The approval of the design review plan is in the best interests of the public health, safety, and general welfare.

Facts: The project site at 184 Emerald Way is located within the RS-L zoning district and is not within any designated hazard zones, including landslide, flood, earthquake fault rupture, or liquefaction zones. However, the property is within the Local Responsibility Area of the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Zone, as defined by the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. As such, the project must comply with applicable fire safety standards, including the installation of a fire sprinkler system consistent with NFPA 13D, as amended by the State of California.

The project will also be required to meet all applicable State and local building regulations, including the California Building Code and California Residential Code, which govern structural safety, accessibility, energy efficiency, and fire resistance. Collectively, these requirements ensure that the project promotes public health, safety, and welfare.

Finding #3: General site considerations, including site layout, open space and topography, orientation and location of buildings, vehicular access, circulation and parking, setbacks, height, walls, fences, public safety and similar elements have been designed to provide a desirable environment for the development.

Facts: The project complies with applicable zoning standards for height, setbacks, parking, fences, and related elements (see Tables 1 and 2 of Finding #1). Site modifications are intended to enhance usability and visual appeal while minimizing grading and preserving the existing topography where feasible.

Permeable pavers will replace concrete in the driveway and rear/side yard areas, increasing site permeability from 31.9% to 55.3%. This change reduces impervious surface coverage and contributes to improved stormwater management. New landscaping steps and front yard planters are proposed, reflecting similar treatments on adjacent properties and enhancing curb appeal.

Masonry retaining walls are proposed along shared property lines to support existing grade transitions and help prevent erosion and runoff. A solar access study confirms that the new second-story addition, located on the downslope side of the lot, will not cast significant shadows on the adjacent home at 178 Emerald Way.

Finding #4: General architectural considerations, including the character, scale, and quality of the design, the architectural relationship with the site and other buildings, building materials, colors, screening of exterior appurtenances, exterior lighting and signing, and similar elements have been incorporated in order to insure the compatibility of this development with its design concept and the character of adjacent buildings.

Facts: The project introduces a more modern and streamlined architectural style while preserving compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood. The proposed massing, with stepped-back second floor and roof lines, remains consistent with nearby homes. Features such as the relocated front entry hall and the addition of a third garage bay are compatible with architectural patterns observed along the street.

The proposed exterior materials include a mix of smooth troweled stucco (cream) and composite wood siding (ebony and light oak), which are contemporary yet harmonious with the neighborhood's existing finishes. Roofing options include black metal standing seam, onyx asphalt shingles, or charcoal black composite slate tile. Final selection may involve a combination or single treatment consistent with the design intent.

Windows and doors will feature black fiberglass composite frames, with black French and metal exterior doors, and a panel garage door that matches the adjacent siding. The main entry will feature a pivot-style front door with sidelights, finished in white oak, alder, or birch with black accents.

This project represents the first significant remodel of this type in the immediate neighborhood. It increases the home's square footage and updates its appearance while maintaining its compatibility with the surrounding context.

Finding #5: General landscape considerations, including the location, type, size, color, texture, and coverage of plant materials at the time of planting and after a 5-year growth period, provision for irrigation, maintenance and protection of landscaped areas and

similar elements have been considered to ensure visual relief, to complement buildings and structures, and to provide an attractive environment for the enjoyment of the public.

Facts: The proposed landscape plan enhances the home's functionality and visual appeal. New landscape steps and raised planters will be added to the front yard to provide structure and soften the transition between built elements and open space. These treatments are consistent with similar features found on neighboring properties. The existing front lawn will be refreshed, and new planting areas will be concentrated within the added planters.

Masonry retaining walls will reinforce site grading along shared property lines, supporting both erosion control and water runoff management. The project proposes a total landscape area of 1,535 square feet, including 609 square feet in the front yard and 926 square feet in the rear and side yards.

Increased site permeability is achieved through a combination of permeable landscaping and permeable hardscape, including the redesigned driveway, which replaces existing solid concrete. The resulting design provides greater environmental benefits, visual interest, and improved stormwater infiltration while remaining consistent with the neighborhood character.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

The proposed project is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to CEQA Guidelines §15061(b)(3), which is the "General Rule" exemption. This exemption applies to projects that have no potential to cause a significant environmental impact. "Where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA." The project involves exterior remodel and addition of an existing single-family residence in conformance with the zoning ordinance on a property that has previously been developed; therefore, there is no potential environmental impact.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff requests that the Planning Commission consider and approve the resolution approving Design Review Permit 25-02 for a substantial remodel of the existing 2,598 square foot single-family residence at 184 Emerald Way (APN: 407-093-006-2) within the Residential Single Family Low Density Zoning District.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Resolution
2. Design Review Plan Set