



Friends of Los Altos, Inc. (FOIA)

A non-profit, non-partisan, volunteer-run organization

A Rare Display of Non-Partisanship

Yes, you read that right, non-partisanship. But before we explain the word, let's discuss one you are likely more familiar with – bipartisanship. Anyone who follows politics in Washington DC (how could you not over the events of the past few years?) knows that bipartisanship is a word rarely uttered. We liken it to old English words which few if any still use, such as *zwozder*, *woofits*, *grufeling* and perhaps our favorite *quomodocunquize*. For those who don't know the last is a verb that means to make money in any way that you can. Somehow both the sound and the meaning of that word belongs in the heart of Silicon Valley. But we digress.

So why are we talking about bi-partisanship and non-partisanship, you may ask? And for those who don't know, non-partisanship is what we are supposed to have in Los Altos government. That's because City Council members are not representing a political party. For those who attended the review at the February 8th City Council of a proposed multi-family residential project at 355 First Street, we saw a united City Council. For at least for 3 hours all five Council Members were focused on providing actionable direction to the applicant on how to prevent the 4-story, 50 unit, 200 foot long building from creating the Grand Canyon of Los Altos. If you didn't read our article about the Grand Canyon of Los Altos, and therefore don't understand to what we are referring, we suggest you read it on our website (www.friendsoflosaltos.org). The proposed project at 355 First was an integral part of that article and had raised many concerns which the Council likewise brought up during the project review.

While we often see a very divided City Council, with 3-2 votes the norm not the exception, there was a sense of common purpose and mutual respect among the Council Members that we found.... wellrefreshing. There was unanimous agreement among the five Council Members that the project needed significant changes to its design before being approved.

Our sincere hope is that they have righted this white elephant and perhaps it can be turned into a swan. For those who did not attend, the applicant was directed to work with staff to address a number of architectural issues, including the mass and bulk, setbacks, location of BMR units, etc.

Kudos to all of the Council for being prepared and thoughtful in their comments. Each brought a different perspective to the project, and all offered clear direction and specific comments to the applicant. Of particular note were the issues raised by the Mayor, Anita Enander, who brings both extensive experience from her service on the Planning Commission as well as on the Downtown Building Committee which was formed in 2012, specifically in response to the (then) prospect of a Grand Canyon on First Street. There were numerous recommendations from that effort, most of which were never used in reviewing projects along First Street.

We can only hope that the City Attorney does not advise the council to back off on its position and the expectation that this project will better fit with the mass and bulk and character of our City. Unfortunately, as of late, the City attorney's advice often is to back down on an issue, even if the City has a defensible position, the goal appears to be to avoid potential lawsuits at all costs. While we don't advocate for needlessly exposing the City to litigation, sometimes not backing off a position when the facts are in your favor, is the right course of action.

So once again, kudos to the City Council, both collectively and individually. We should note that while we are often critical of the City Council---that is, when we believe that the Council is not doing the job they were elected to do---we also believe that we have a responsibility to give both kudos and positive feedback to the Council when they do an excellent job representing the interests of our City.

We want to see more of this constructive collaboration on other projects and issues of concern to the residents and the community. Our goal is to write an article entitled "The Fabulous Five", unless of course that title is already taken. We hope it is about the current members of our City Council.

And that is the way we see it.

Friends of Los Altos

Los Altos, CA 94022 & 94024

<https://friendsoflosaltos.org>