



The County of San Diego

Planning Commission Hearing Report

Date:	July 9, 2025	Case/File No.:	Namoo Residence Variance Permit; PDS2024-VAR-24-086
Place:	County Conference Center 5520 Overland Avenue San Diego, CA 92123	Project:	Administrative Variance
Time:	9:00 a.m.	Location:	894 Bernita Road, El Cajon, CA 92020
Agenda Item:	# 2	General Plan:	Semi-Rural Residential (SR-1)
Appeal Status:	No further appeals available for the Administrative Variance; Notice of Exemption CEQA Environmental Determination appealable to the Board of Supervisors	Zoning:	Limited Agriculture (A70)
Applicant/Owner:	Samer Namoo	Community:	Valle De Oro Community Plan Area
Environmental:	Notice of Exemption	APN:	493-400-39-00

A. OVERVIEW

The purpose of this report is to provide the Planning Commission (PC) with the necessary information to consider a request for a Standard Variance (VAR) associated with the proposed development of a single-family residence at 894 Bernita Road. The requested action would authorize a reduction in the front yard setback from forty feet to twenty feet in order to allow for the construction of a new two-story single-family dwelling and associated site improvements. This report includes a staff analysis of project conformance with the County Zoning Ordinance, San Diego County General Plan, and procedural requirements pursuant to Section 7100 et seq. of the Zoning Ordinance.

Staff recommends approval of the Variance request, subject to conditions and findings outlined under Section 7107 of the Zoning Ordinance because the proposed reduction in setback will not grant a special privilege and it is necessary to allow for reasonable development of the parcel due to unique site constraints.

The project site is located in the Valle de Oro Community Plan Area and is designated as Semi-Rural

Residential (SR-1) under the County's General Plan. The 0.50-acre parcel (APN 493-400-39-00) is zoned RR (Rural Residential) and is constrained by a 20-foot-wide private road easement that bisects the lot, substantially limiting the buildable area. The applicant seeks relief from the front yard setback standard to increase design flexibility while maintaining compatibility with surrounding residential properties.

B. REQUESTED ACTIONS

This is a request for the Planning Commission to evaluate the proposed Variance for a single-family residence, to determine if the required findings can be made and, if so, take the following actions:

1. Adopt the Environmental Findings included in Attachment D, which includes a finding that the project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).
2. Grant Variance PDS2024-VAR-24-086, make the findings, and impose the requirements and conditions as set forth in the Form of Decision (Attachment B).

C. PROJECT BACKGROUND

A discretionary permit application (PDS2024-VAR-24-086) was submitted to the County on November 4, 2024, by Boushra Salem of Finest City Design Builder, acting on behalf of the property owner, Samer Namoo. The proposed project includes demolition of the existing 868-square-foot structure (already completed), and construction of a new 4,000-square-foot two-story residence, along with a swimming pool, driveway, fire access turnaround, and an alternative on-site wastewater treatment system (septic system) in the rear of the property.

The variance was initially noticed for public comment on January 21, 2025. In accordance with Section 7105 of the Zoning Ordinance, the decision was to be rendered by the Director of Planning & Development Service unless a hearing was requested by an interested party. A hearing request was submitted by one of the parties who received public notice of the project. In consultation with County Counsel, it was determined that the request met the requirements of Section 7105, and the matter was therefore scheduled for a hearing before the Planning Commission.

D. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

1. Project Description

The applicant proposes to construct a new 4,000-square-foot, two-story single-family residence at 894 Bernita Road, along with associated site improvements. The project includes the installation of a 600-square-foot in-ground swimming pool, which will be processed under a separate permit. To support on-site wastewater needs, an alternative septic treatment system is proposed in the rear portion of the property, along with a 1,050-square-foot reserve disposal area. Vehicular access will be provided by a 1,600-square-foot permeable driveway, and fire safety access is accommodated through a designated turnaround. Additional site features include utility service improvements to support the new residential development.

The project site is constrained by the presence of a private road easement, which bisects the front portion of the property and establishes a 40-foot front yard setback measured from its centerline. To accommodate the proposed development, the applicant is requesting a front yard setback variance

to allow a reduced setback of 20 feet. No other setback variances are being sought. The rear of the property is designated for the septic treatment system and reserve area, and relocating the residence further back would conflict with required health and safety separations between structures and site wastewater infrastructure. As such, the variance is necessary to allow reasonable development of the site, while maintaining compliance with environmental health regulations.



Figure 1: View facing north, showing entry onto the parcel with the access easement bisecting the parcel.



Figure 2: Rear of the lot facing southwest, highlighting interior site conditions and existing boundary wall.



Figure 3: Aerial showing shared access easement.

2. Subject Property and Surrounding Land Uses

The subject property is located at 894 Bernita Road in the unincorporated community of El Cajon, within the Valle de Oro Community Plan Area. The site is identified by Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 493-400-39-00 and encompasses approximately 0.50 gross acres (0.42 net acres). The parcel is situated in a developed semi-rural residential neighborhood and is accessed via a private road easement originating from Horizon Hills Drive. The property is relatively rectangular in shape, measuring approximately 105 feet wide by 207.5 feet deep, and is constrained by a 20-foot-wide road easement that bisects the lot longitudinally, significantly limiting the area available for development.

The parcel is currently vacant, following the permitted demolition of a previously existing 868-square-foot residence. The topography of the site features moderate slopes and scattered boulder formations, particularly in the rear yard area, which further restricts the buildable area and influences the final siting of the proposed home.

Surrounding land uses are primarily residential in nature, as illustrated in Table D-1: Surrounding Zoning and Land Uses, which shows that all adjacent properties are designated as Semi-Rural Residential (SR-1) under the General Plan and zoned Limited Agriculture (A70). These neighboring properties, located along Horizon Ridge, Bluff Place, Horizon Hills Drive, and Horizon Pointe, are developed with single-family residential homes. The residential character is further emphasized by parcel sizes generally ranging from 0.5 to over 1.5 acres.

A survey of nearby properties within a 500-foot radius indicates an average home size of approximately 3,500 square feet. These homes are typically set back further from the road and are not impacted by bisecting easements or similar constraints. The proposed residence, at 4,000 square

feet, is consistent in scale and bulk with other homes in the vicinity and would maintain the semi-rural character of the area.

The area includes a mix of mature landscaping, retaining walls, and private driveways, and reflects an established pattern of development. The subject parcel is not located within a mapped flood hazard zone, nor is it subject to any special overlay zones or scenic corridor designations. Given these conditions and the constraints imposed by the road easement and septic system location, the requested front yard setback variance is necessary to enable a comparable and context-sensitive residential development that aligns with the neighborhood character. See Figure 5 for the approximate location of the proposed single-family residence.

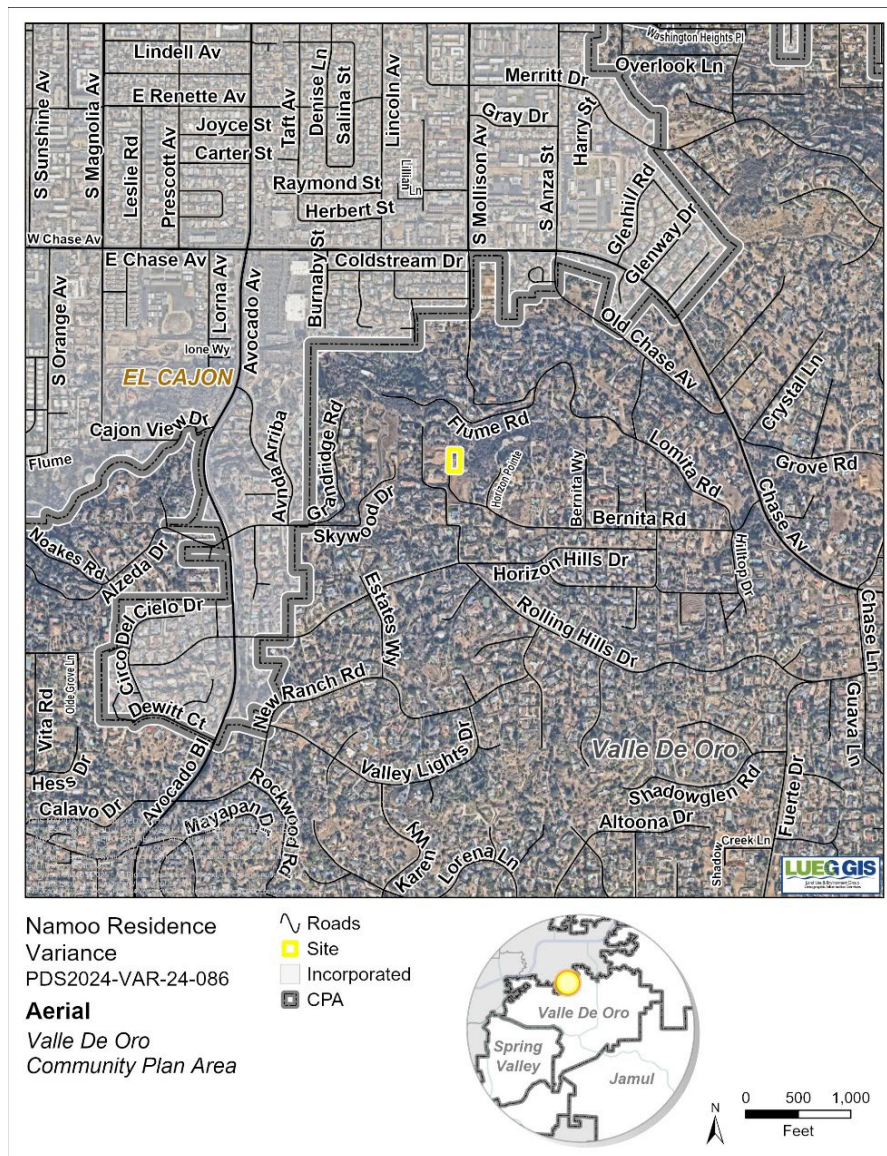


Figure 4: Vicinity Map

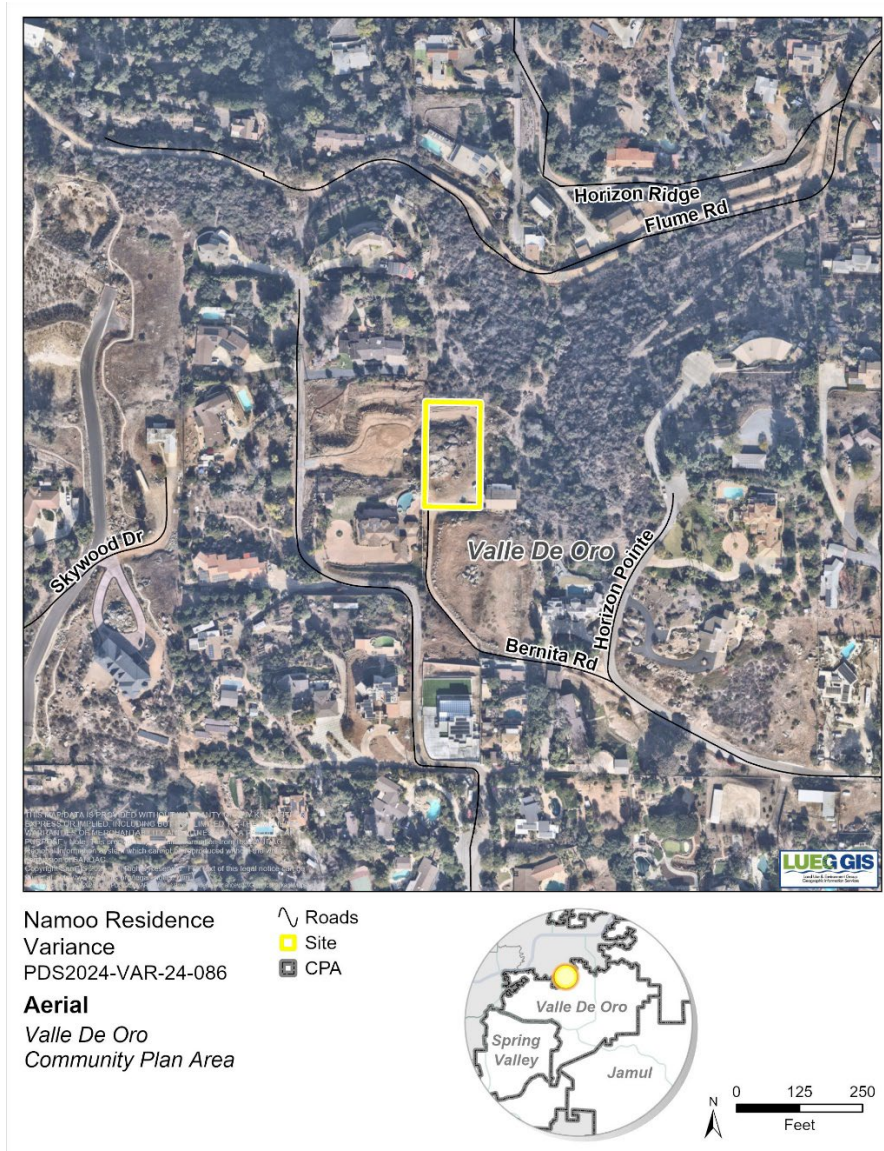


Figure 5: Aerial photograph showing proposed project site and project vicinity.

Location	General Plan	Zoning	Adjacent Streets	Description
North	Semi-Rural Residential (SR-1)	Limited Agriculture (A70)	Horizon Ridge	Single Family Residential
East	Semi-Rural Residential (SR-1)	Limited Agriculture (A70)	Bluff Place	Single Family Residential

Location	General Plan	Zoning	Adjacent Streets	Description
South	Semi-Rural Residential (SR-1)	Limited Agriculture (A70)	Horizon Hills Dr	Single Family Residential
West	Semi-Rural Residential (SR-1)	Limited Agriculture (A70)	Horizon Pointe	Single Family Residential

Table D-1: Surrounding Zoning and Land Uses

E. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Project has been reviewed to ensure it conforms to all the relevant ordinances and guidelines, including, but not limited to, the San Diego County General Plan, the Valle De Oro Community Plan, the Zoning Ordinance, and CEQA Guidelines. The following subjects were reviewed for the project and are detailed below: Site Planning Analysis, Physical Constraints, Community Compatibility/Visual Impacts Consistency with Surrounding Development.

1. Key Requirements for Requested Actions

The Planning Commission should consider the requested actions and determine if the following determinations can be made:

- a. Is the Project consistent with the vision, goals, and policies of the General Plan?
- b. Does the Project comply with the policies set forth under the Valle De Oro Community Plan?
- c. Is the Project consistent with the County's Zoning Ordinance?
- d. Is the Project consistent with the County's Variance Ordinance?
- e. Does the Project comply with CEQA?

2. Project Analysis

The project site is uniquely constrained by both its physical configuration and legal encumbrances, despite being located within a residential zone that permits single-family development. Due to the presence of a 20-foot-wide private road easement bisecting the lot, the parcel's usable area is significantly reduced compared to surrounding properties. As a result, the proposed two-story, 4,000-square-foot single-family residence requires approval of a front yard setback variance to allow for proper site planning and functional layout. The variance will facilitate development that is consistent with the surrounding neighborhood in both scale and character, while accommodating the site's septic system, topographic conditions, and infrastructure requirements.

Site Planning Analysis

The project site consists of a 0.50-acre parcel located within a semi-rural residential neighborhood in the Valle de Oro Community Plan Area. The parcel is constrained by a 20-foot-wide private road easement that bisects the property, limiting the functional buildable area. The proposed project

includes construction of a new 4,000-square-foot two-story single-family residence, along with a 600-square-foot in-ground swimming pool, permeable driveway, and fire access turnaround. The proposed site layout was reviewed by staff and determined to be consistent with the intent of the Zoning Ordinance, subject to the granting of a front yard setback variance. The variance would allow a reduction from the standard 40-foot front yard setback (measured from the centerline of the easement) to 20 feet. The requested adjustment enables the proposed structure to fit within the remaining developable area of the parcel, while preserving space in the rear yard for a septic system and reserve area. The site layout balances development needs with regulatory requirements and infrastructure design constraints and maintains adequate setbacks from adjacent properties.

Physical Constraints

The property's topographic conditions further complicate development of the site. The site includes moderate slopes and natural rock outcroppings, particularly toward the rear of the lot, which restrict where construction can reasonably occur. The location of the septic system and required separation distances limit the ability to shift the home further back on the parcel. These factors, combined with the bisecting road easement, significantly reduce site flexibility. Without relief from the front yard setback, development on the parcel would result in a disproportionately small buildable area when compared to other properties in the vicinity. The requested variance accommodates the parcel's physical limitations while enabling construction of a residence consistent with the character of the area.

Community Compatibility/Visual Impacts

The proposed residence is compatible with the established visual and architectural character of the neighborhood. Homes in the area are generally one to two stories in height and range between 3,000 to 5,000 square feet on average. The project proposes a 4,000-square-foot structure with associated improvements that match the scale and form of surrounding development. Although the requested front yard setback would position the home closer to the private roadway than others in the area, existing landscaping and topographic variation will help reduce visibility from adjacent parcels and public view corridors. The design is typical of the neighborhood, and the development will maintain a residential appearance consistent with the Valle de Oro Community Plan's intent.

Consistency with Surrounding Development

The surrounding neighborhood is composed of single-family residential lots ranging from approximately 0.5 to over 1.5 acres in size. An evaluation of twenty-four nearby parcels indicates an average home size of approximately 3,750 square feet. The proposed residence would be similar in both scale and massing, ensuring consistency with the existing built environment. The setback reduction would allow the applicant to construct a home that is reasonably sized for the lot and reflective of the broader development pattern in the community. Approval of the variance would not introduce a new or incompatible land use, and the design integrates with the surrounding semi-rural context, supporting General Plan goals for neighborhood continuity and infill development.

3. General Plan Consistency

The proposed Project is consistent with the following relevant General Plan goals, policies, and actions as described in Table E-1.

Table E-1: General Plan Conformance

General Plan Policy	Explanation of Project Conformance
<p>GOAL LU-1 – Planned Communities: Support development that maintains the unique character of communities while providing for growth.</p>	<p>The proposed single-family residence aligns with the scale and character of nearby homes in the semi-rural residential neighborhood. The project reflects the surrounding development pattern and maintains the low-density residential use envisioned for this community.</p>
<p>GOAL LU-6 – Compatibility of Land Uses: Ensure development is compatible with the scale, character, and environmental setting of the area.</p>	<p>The residence is designed to be consistent in massing and form with surrounding homes, averaging approximately 3,750 square feet. The 4,000-square-foot proposed home is appropriate given the neighborhood context and does not introduce incompatible land uses or visual impacts.</p>
<p>POLICY LU-2.1 – Maintain Rural Character: Preserve the rural community character and lifestyle by directing appropriate design and scale of development.</p>	<p>The proposed project maintains rural characteristics by using permeable paving, incorporating on-site wastewater treatment, and retaining the lot's spacious layout despite its physical constraints. The design is sensitive to the area's rural identity.</p>
<p>POLICY LU-5.5 – Development Siting and Design: Require development to minimize grading and respond to site topography, drainage, and other physical constraints.</p>	<p>The presence of a bisecting private road easement and a steep rear slope with boulders presents physical constraints that limit feasible development on the property. The requested variance allows for reasonable site utilization without requiring excessive grading or impacting environmentally sensitive areas.</p>
<p>POLICY COS 11.3 – Development Siting and Design. Require development in visually sensitive areas to minimize visual impacts and preserve unique or special visual features, particularly in rural areas.</p>	<p>The proposed residence is visually compatible with the neighborhood, and existing vegetation, fencing, and topography will help screen the structure. The home is not located along a scenic corridor and will not impact any designated visual resources.</p>

4. Zoning Ordinance Consistency

a. Development Regulations

The proposed Project complies with all applicable zoning requirements of the A70 (Limited Agriculture) zone with the incorporation of conditions of approval (See Table E-2).

Table E-2: Zoning Ordinance Development Regulations

CURRENT ZONING REGULATIONS		CONSISTENT?
Use Regulation:	A70	Yes
Animal Regulation:	L	N/A
Density:	-	N/A
Lot Size:	1AC	N/A
Building Type:	C	N/A
Height:	G	Yes
Lot Coverage:	-	N/A
Setback:	C	Yes, with approval of Variance
Open Space:	-	N/A
Special Area Regulations:	-	N/A

Development Standard	Proposed/Provided	Complies?
Section 4600 of the Zoning Ordinance sets the maximum height requirements. This parcel has a designated height of "G" which requires structures to be no more than 35 feet in height.	The proposed structure is a single-family residence and accessory uses. The structure does not exceed 35 feet in height. No height exception is requested.	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 4810(d) of the Zoning Ordinance requires a 40-foot front yard setback measured from the centerline of a private easement less than 40 feet wide.	The proposed residence encroaches into the required 40-foot front yard setback. A Standard Variance is requested. If approved, the project would comply with the applicable front yard setback requirements.	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

b. Zoning Ordinance Consistency

The proposed project involves the construction of a new single-family residence on a legal lot zoned A70 (Limited Agriculture), with a Semi-Rural Residential (SR-1) land use designation under the San Diego County General Plan. A detached single-family residence is a permitted use in the A70 zone pursuant to Section 6110 of the Zoning Ordinance.

The project complies with applicable development standards for building height (Section 4600), attached and detached accessory structures (section 6156.a.1 and 6156.h) and off-street parking (Section 6758). However, the proposed structure encroaches into the required 40-foot front yard setback, measured from the centerline of the private road easement, as specified in

Section 4810(d) of the Zoning Ordinance. A Standard Variance is therefore requested to allow a reduced front yard setback.

The project has been reviewed for consistency with applicable policies of the San Diego County General Plan, including the Land Use Element. The proposed residence will maintain a semi-rural development pattern, is compatible with surrounding residential uses, and avoids impacts to environmentally sensitive areas. Therefore, with approval of the requested variance, the project would be consistent with both the Zoning Ordinance and the General Plan.

Table E-3: Zoning Ordinance Consistency

Development Standard	Proposed/Provided	Complies?
Section 6110 of the Zoning Ordinance allows detached single-family residences by right in the A70 zone.	The construction of a detached single-family residence is a permitted use in the A70 zone. No discretionary permit required for use.	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 6156.a.1 of the Zoning Ordinance limits the total area of attached accessory structures on parcels less than 1 acre to 1,000 sq ft or 25% of living area, whichever is greater.	If attached accessory structures (such as a garage or storage room) are proposed, they will comply with the area limit of 1,000 square feet or 25% of the proposed residence, whichever is greater.	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 6156.h of the Zoning Ordinance limits the total area of all detached accessory structures on parcels less than 1 acre to 2,000 square feet.	If any detached garage, workshop, or similar non-habitable structure is proposed, the combined area will not exceed 2,000 square feet. Structures not meeting main building setbacks are limited to a combined area of 1,000 square feet.	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 6156.h.3 of the Zoning Ordinance limits detached accessory structures to 12 feet in height unless they meet main building setbacks, in which case they may be up to 24 feet.	Detached accessory structures will be limited to one story and 12 feet in height, unless sited to meet main building setbacks, in which case 24 feet is allowed. No structures exceeding these limits are proposed.	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 6758 of the Zoning Ordinance requires two off-street parking spaces per single-family dwelling.	The project will provide two off-street parking spaces, either uncovered or in a garage	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

5. California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Compliance

The project has been reviewed for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and it has been determined that the proposed action qualifies for a Categorical Exemption pursuant to Section 15305 of the State CEQA Guidelines. Section 15305 exempts minor alterations in land use limitations, such as setback variances, where the project will not result in any changes in land use or density.

The request involves a Standard Variance to allow a reduced front yard setback for the construction of a single-family residence. The subject property is a legal lot, zoned A70 (Limited Agriculture), and has an average slope of less than 20 percent. The project does not propose subdivision, grading beyond ordinance thresholds, or any development that would result in adverse environmental effects. Therefore, the project is exempt from environmental review under CEQA.

F. COMMUNITY PLANNING GROUP AND DESIGN REVIEW BOARD RECOMMENDATION

On December 3, 2024, the Valle De Oro Community Planning Group (CPG) recommended approval of the project without conditions by a vote of 10-0-0-5 (10– Ayes; 10– Noes; 0 – Abstain; 5 – Absent/Vacant).

The Valle De Oro CPG Recommendation Form and Meeting Minutes are found in Attachment E, Public Documentation.

G. PUBLIC INPUT

In accordance with Board Policy I-49, public notices were distributed at the time of application submittal to ensure at least 20 different property owners within approximately 500 feet of the project site were notified. During the permit processing period, staff received general inquiries as well as formal written comments expressing concerns in opposition to the proposed project.

Following the issuance of the Notice of Proposed Standard Variance Application on January 21, 2025, which included the opportunity for the public to request a hearing, additional written opposition was submitted. While staff worked with concerned property owners to address and resolve the majority of issues raised, one unresolved concern remained.

As a result, a formal request for a hearing was submitted in opposition to the Variance. In response, public notices were again distributed to a minimum of 20 property owners within approximately 500 feet of the site, and the project was scheduled for consideration by the Planning Commission in accordance with Zoning Ordinance Section 7105.

H. RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission take the following actions:

1. Find the Project in conformance with CEQA and adopt the Environmental Findings included in Attachment D which include a finding that the project is exempt from CEQA.
2. Grant PDS2024-VAR-24-086, make the findings, and impose the requirements and conditions as set forth in the Form of Decision in Attachment B.

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AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE:

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ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Planning Documentation

Attachment B – Form of Decision Approving PDS2024-VAR-24-086

Attachment C – Environmental Documentation

Attachment D – Environmental Findings

Attachment E – Public Documentation

Attachment F – Ownership Disclosure Form

Attachment A – Planning Documentation

**Attachment B – Form of Decision
Approving PDS2024-VAR-24-086**

Attachment C – Environmental Documentation

Attachment D – Environmental Findings

Attachment E – Public Documentation

Attachment F – Ownership Disclosure Form