



June 18, 2026

County of Santa Cruz
Planning Commission Members
County of Santa Cruz Planning Department
701 Ocean Street, Room 400, Santa Cruz, CA 95060

RE: Appeal Letter from Coats Consulting % Greg Howell

Dear Santa Cruz County Planning Commission Members,

My name is Jerrod Nicholls, and I am a Project Manager with Fuse Architects. We are writing in response to the appeal filed by Michelle and Geary Coats on behalf of Greg Howell. This appeal appears to be an effort to significantly modify the design of the proposed residence and/or delay the project. Our goal is to provide context regarding our clients and the project, and to debunk the false narrative that this design is non-compliant or was prematurely reviewed.

We have been working with Stan and Melissa Vuckovich on their new home on 24th Avenue since September 2024. From the outset, we were tasked with designing a home that adheres strictly to the parameters of the Pleasure Point Combining District and the Santa Cruz County Code; since they are by-the-book people, that was our goal at the beginning. We learned this priority was somewhat driven by the Vuckovich's previous experience where a nextdoor neighbor developed their property and was granted Exceptions to reduce the 2nd floor setback and increase both Lot Coverage and FAR (REV211121). While the Vuckovich's didn't feel it was fair that a larger-than-allowed house was now blocking their entire ocean view, they didn't appeal the project. Instead, they were neighborly with the owners and looked for other opportunities for a beach house with a view.

To ensure a smooth review process, we met with the Coastal Commission before our initial County submission to gather their feedback. We also coordinated extensively with our Planner, Evan Ditmars, to confirm that our design is 100% compliant. This required a more thorough review because the lot presents specific challenges for measuring maximum building height: it slopes 7% from the start of the driveway to the rear property line (a 7-foot drop over ±100-feet spanning east to west) along with up to 3% of slope from the side property lines (anywhere from 6-inches to over 1.5-feet of drop spanning north to south)—see figure 1 below and also sheet A2 in the drawing set.

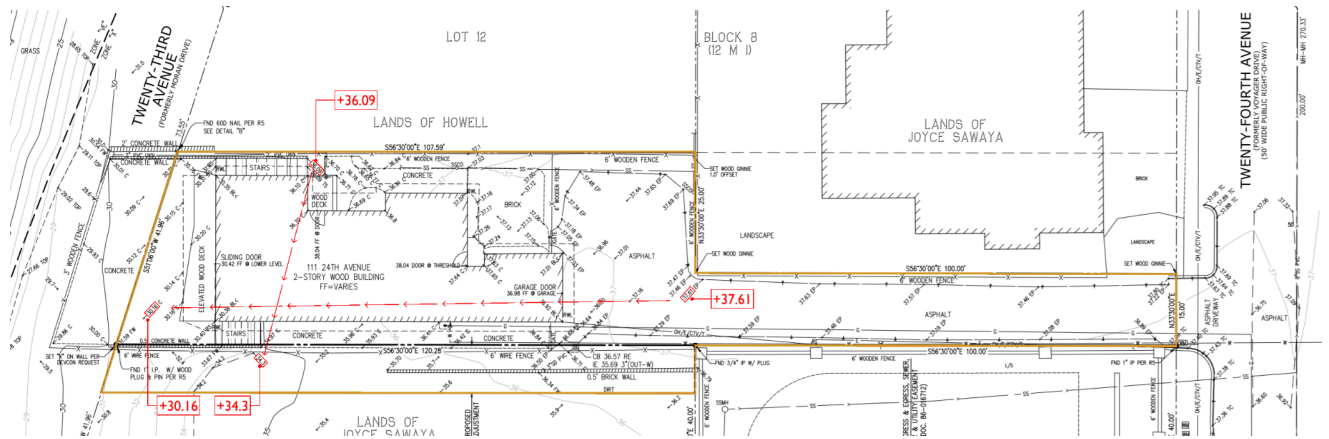


figure 1 - topographic diagram highlighting spot elevations representing significant slope in site (clipped from sheet A2)

Because of the site's sloping nature, we proposed a roof profile that follows the topography while also providing visual interest—see figure 2 below and reference sheet A7. The roof has a main ridge and a main eave at the front of the house that span the building's entire width. However, a secondary lower ridge towards the back of the house does not span the building's entire width; it terminates to allow for a lower roof section there—see figure 3 below and sheets A7, A10 and A11. With Stan and Melissa's input, we made a conscious effort to reduce the roof massing on the northwest end to respect the neighbor, whom the Vuckovich's had never met at the time. As a result, the northwest portion of the house is more than 10-feet back from the northwest corner of the existing residence, and the roof is over 3-feet lower at that part of the house than on the upper roof adjacent to it.

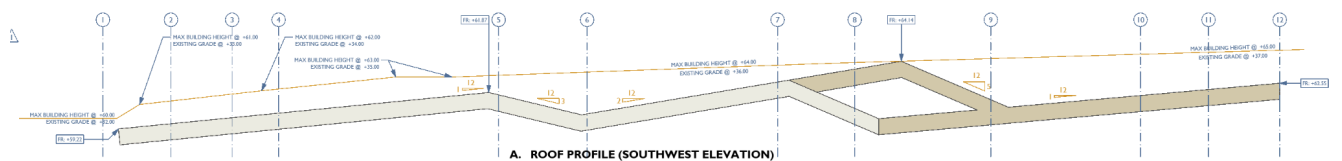


figure 2 - southwest roof profile with max allowable height shown in orange (clipped from sheet A7)



figure 3 - reduced massing (red) at northwest part of roof (closest portion of roof to Greg Howell's 3rd floor deck) clipped from sheet A10

Aside from considering neighborhood context early in the design process, Stan and Melissa made other voluntary neighborly efforts. Greg Howell reached out to Stan asking him personally for the plans and not only did Stan share the plans but he even met at Greg's house to review the plans together. It was there that Stan endured Greg's displeasure over the design and Greg's questioning of programmatic elements of the house, such as the Theater and Atrium. After that, they invited every other neighbor to their home to review the plans and be available for questions and comments. Additionally, Stan also agreed to let us (Fuse) meet with Greg and the Coats, which we did on April 27th. It was in this meeting that the Coats requested a sun (or shadow) study. They were to use this as a tool to assist in identifying "exit ramps" that Stan can take in order for the project to not get appealed by them. We uncovered toward the end of the meeting that these "exit ramps" included, but were not limited to, lowering the house around 4 or 5 feet at the rear and setting back the rear exterior walls significantly—both design revisions focused on allowing Greg to have a view *through* the Vuckovich's property. We found it interesting that Greg and the Coats already had revisions in mind before a sun study was even provided to them. That same day, we sent the Coats plans and elevations so that they could mark up what their "exit ramps" were but we never received anything back and have still yet to see anything from them. We provided the sun study figures 2 weeks later on Monday May 11th (4 days before the ZA hearing) and learned that they needed a 3rd party for peer review since they didn't understand how to interpret the figures. We have attached the sun studies to this letter for your reference.

Regarding the specific points of the appeal, we would like to clarify several inaccuracies:

I. Compliance with SCCC 13.10.444-446.1: This section of code describes the "Purpose of the Pleasure Point Community Design PP Combining District," which are the standards we designed the home to. The first purpose listed is 13.10.444(A): "Reduce the visual and shading impacts of new and expanded houses on neighboring parcels and houses." Section 13.10.446(A) outlines "Standards and Incentives Regarding Residential Building Mass and Height, and Access to Sun and Light." This is achieved with Second Story Setbacks (13.10.446(A)(1)): "For new two-story residential structures or second story additions...exceeding 15 feet in height...shall be set back from the side yard property line as follows" and the following code (13.10.446(A)(1)(a)) addresses lots 35 feet or greater stating that the setback "...shall be at least 10 feet from the side yard property line." It further states that the design "shall comply with the minimum and maximum dimensions of the building volume envelope limit diagram..." which I've provided in figure 4 below:

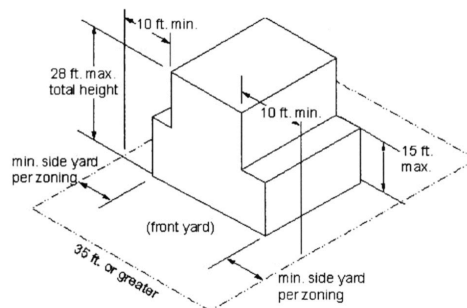


figure 4 - building volume envelope limit diagram from 13.10.446(A)(1)(a)

This house follows these guidelines, thus ensuring compliance with the requirements to reduce visual and shading impacts. These guidelines were adopted from the Pleasure Point Community Plan drafted in July of 2008. Goal #3 (not Goal #2 as Michelle states) is for "Promoting access to Sun and Light". The previous guidelines did not require a second story setback but community workshops uncovered a strong desire to allow neighboring houses adequate access to solar gain and natural light. The resolution was to create setback standards based on lot width. The Pleasure Point Community Plan *does not* mention that a shade study is required, nor does it mention that a shade study "could require that the proposed house be redesigned to respond to the findings," as Michelle states. It should be noted that the proposed roof at the rear of the house is nowhere near the maximum allowable building volume envelope limit.

2. Square Footage and Neighborhood Context: The claim that the house is 49% larger than the average home on 23rd Avenue lacks necessary context. The Vuckovich's lot (7,276 SF) is significantly larger than the average lot on 23rd Avenue (4,080 SF). So are many other lots on 24th Avenue: 24,611.4 SF (103 24th Ave), 6,835.92 SF (145 24th Ave) and 8,276.4 SF (155 24th Ave). Additionally, development standards have changed where previous FAR and Lot Coverage was 50% and 40% respectively and are now 60% and 45%, allowing for larger homes. Our design conforms to the allowed Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and Lot Coverage standards. Also, as noted in the Pleasure Point Community Plan on page 26, the diversity in lot sizes and footprints is a defining feature and seen as a positive to this neighborhood:

"The wide range of lot sizes in Pleasure Point is a significant factor in the eclectic nature of the area. Sizes of lots range from under 2,000 square feet to over 12,000 square feet. Furthermore, small and large size lots sit side by side in many areas within Pleasure Point. There is also tremendous diversity in the configuration of lots between 20 feet and 100 feet wide and between 40 feet and 250 feet deep. Refer to diagram "Parcel Size Variation" on page 28 to see the diversity of lot sizes. The wide range of lot size variation in Pleasure Point is an interesting and uncommon feature that has contributed significantly to the area's distinctive character and wide variety of building footprints. (See diagram on page 27 showing the variety of building footprints). Most importantly, this range of lot sizes has resulted in a tremendous mix of housing types within Pleasure Point."

3. Site Calculation: The appeal incorrectly claims we used the wrong square footage for the buildable site. Per SCCC 13.10.510(E) and (F), FAR and Lot Coverage are calculated based on the gross site area, excluding coastal bluffs or beaches, which we have done correctly.

4. Building Height: The appeal falsely claims the house is 32 feet tall. As illustrated on sheets A7, A8, A9, A10, A11 and A14, all roof profiles are measured from existing grade, and every point remains under the 28-foot limit. While there is 4-feet of fill due to the slope, the house remains compliant with height restrictions from the original grade—see figure 5 below and sheet A9.

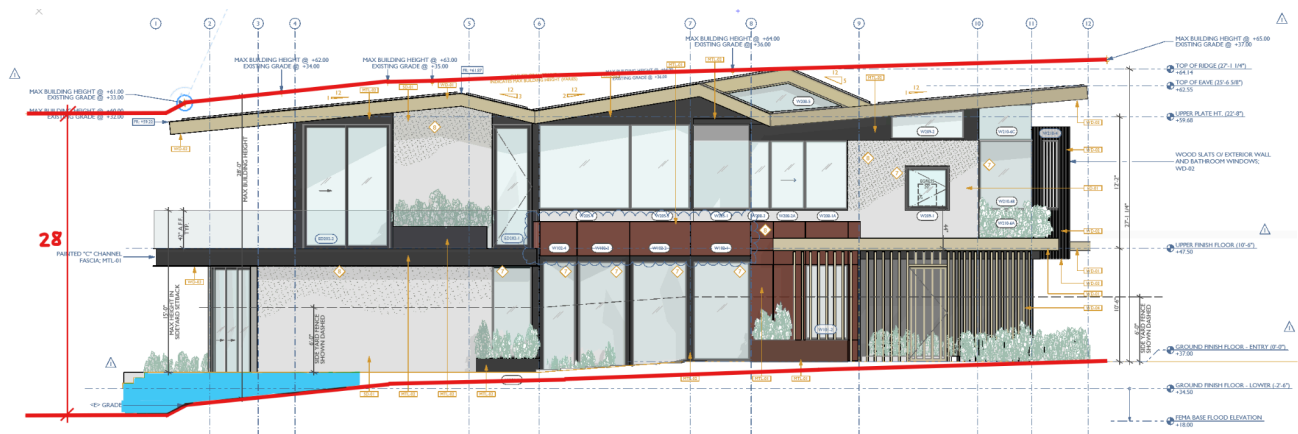


figure 5 - Side elevation showing existing grade and max building height in red. Even with the rear of the house (left) raised above existing grade (± 4 feet of fill shown in blue), the house is still compliant and not taller than 28'-0"

In conclusion, this project meets every applicable conformance standard. This appeal is based on the loss of a fraction of a private beach view, rather than any actual non-compliance. The Vuckovich's have been exceptionally accommodating, and we believe the truth of the project's compliance is well-established in the Staff Report and the Zoning Administrator's approval. We respectfully request that the Commission uphold the approval of this project.

Best regards,

Jerrold Nicholls
Project Manager, Fuse Architects