

**PLANNING COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT**

Date: March 19, 2025

To: Reno City Planning Commission

Subject: Staff Report (For Possible Action): Case No. LDC25-00044 (1249 Humboldt Parking Variance) - A request has been made for a variance to allow for the construction of an off-street parking area between the front façade of a primary building and Humboldt Street in the Plumas Neighborhood Residential Core Planning Area. The ±0.15 acre site is located on the west side of Humboldt Street, ±110 feet north of its intersection with West Arroyo Street (1249 Humboldt Street). The site is within the Multi-Family Residential – 14 units per acre/Plumas Neighborhood Residential Core Planning Area (MF-14/PL) zoning district and has a Master Plan land use designation of Mixed Neighborhood (MX).

From: Carter Williams, Associate Planner

Ward #: 2

Case No.: LDC25-00044 (1249 Humboldt Parking Variance)

Applicant: Christian Jones

APN: 014-046-19

Request: **Variance:** To allow for the construction of an off-street parking area between the front façade of a primary building and Humboldt Street in the Plumas Neighborhood Residential Core Planning Area.

Location: See Case Maps (**Exhibit A**)

Proposed Motion: Based upon noncompliance with the applicable findings, I move to deny the variance.

Summary:

The ±0.15-acre project site is located on the west side of Humboldt Street, ±110 feet north of its intersection with West Arroyo Street (1249 Humboldt Street). The requested variance would allow for the construction of a parking area between the front face of the existing house and Humboldt Street. The Plumas Neighborhood Residential Core Planning Area standards prohibit parking areas between the house and the street, which in turn encourages their location to the side or rear of the property, particularly in cases where a property has alley access. Key issues related to this request include: 1) compatibility with surrounding development and 2) compliance with required findings. Staff recommends the Planning Commission deny the requested variance.

Background: In April of 1986, a policy guide was adopted that directed Staff to implement a neighborhood planning program. This required the creation of neighborhood plans that address the needs of residents and facilitate citizen input. The Plumas Neighborhood Plan was adopted on January 10, 1995 (Ord. No. 4466) and was later replaced with the Plumas Neighborhood Residential Core Planning Area (PL) Overlay District within the Reno Municipal Code (RMC). The plan's adoption was preceded by 16 meetings and workshops with residents in the Plumas Neighborhood. The requirement that prohibits parking in the front yard of any lot was included with the ordinance as an outcome of this public engagement effort. The Plumas Neighborhood Plan was retired in 2017 with the adoption of the Reimagine Reno Master Plan as all standards were implemented.

Analysis: The applicant proposes installing a two-car parking pad in front of the house along Humboldt Street, abutting the northern property line (**Exhibit B**). The applicant has indicated the reason for the requested variance is to provide additional dedicated off-street parking for the residents of the property and to allow for the construction of an electric vehicle charging station. There are two existing homes on the property with one paved off-street parking space accessed from the alley. This property is currently nonconforming with respect to parking; RMC requires three spaces of which one may be located on-street, and two located onsite.

Compatibility with Surrounding Development: Most of the properties along this block of Humboldt Street do not have curb cuts and driveways. For the homes that do include driveways, the driveway provides access to the rear and side yards or leads to integrated garages, consistent with the requirements of the PL overlay district. Some properties, like those to the south, only have access from the street as they do not abut an alley. There are a handful of examples in the vicinity of the site where property owners appear to have expanded paved areas from existing curb cuts to create additional parking. RMC Section 18.01.401 indicates that nonconformities cannot be used as justification for the establishment of site improvements prohibited elsewhere in the same zoning district. Staff is unable to identify previous variance approvals that establish a precedent in this neighborhood for this type of request.

Variance Findings: There are four findings that must be made by the Planning Commission, along with five general review criteria and considerations. **Variance Findings Nos. 1 & 2** require an extraordinary or exceptional physical characteristic of the property, and that the strict application of the regulation would result in peculiar or exceptional practical difficulties to, or exceptional and undue hardships upon, the owner of the property. There are no extraordinary physical

characteristics to the property as the site has adequate access from the alley, including space to add parking that would be compatible with current requirements.

Further, the condition of this lot is not unique in context with other properties in the vicinity. In fact, there are adjacent properties that may have less capacity to implement additional parking. An alternative exists in this case where a parallel space could be installed between the rear home and the edge of the alley. There is no evidence that an electric vehicle charging station could not be implemented in this location.

Variance Finding No. 3 requires that the request is not materially detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare, or injurious to property or improvements in the vicinity. Although it could be argued that the addition of a vehicle crossing with a public sidewalk increases the capacity for a vehicle-pedestrian incident, the requirement prohibiting parking areas in the front is unique to few neighborhoods in the City. Therefore, the hazard to the public would not be more present than for nearly every residential lot elsewhere. Further, the Plumas Neighborhood Plan did not indicate that this requirement was implemented based on decreased pedestrian safety concerns but rather was intended to maintain visual character of the neighborhood. Staff finds this finding is adequately met.

Variance Finding No. 4 requires that the request be consistent with the intent and purpose of RMC Title 18, which includes the implementation of the policies of the Master Plan and other adopted plans. Although the Plumas Neighborhood Plan has been retired as a guiding policy document, the policy history for the standards for which the variance is requested indicates that the intent was to maintain a specific visual character. Since there is not adequate justification to contradict this intent through the findings above, Staff is unable to make this finding.

Master Plan Conformance: The subject site has a Master Plan land use designation of Single-Family Neighborhood (SF) and is in a Central Neighborhood per the Structure Plan Framework of the Reno Master Plan. As proposed, the project is not in conformance with Master Plan goals and policies related to parking in neighborhoods and the maintenance of neighborhood identity.

Policy N-G.5 indicates that parking in front of the primary structure is discouraged and, where possible, should be located behind the primary structure. In this case, there is an available alternative located off the alley that would provide for consistency with this policy. This is further reinforced by **Policy N-CN.10** which indicates that parking onsite should be consistent with the existing character of surrounding blocks. Policy N-CN.10 also indicates that parking should be accessed from an alley when one exists and that on-street parking in Central Neighborhoods should be supported. This request would result in the transfer of at least one usable on-street parking space to parking for private use, thereby reducing public parking capacity, in conflict with this policy.

The Master Plan also includes policies related to neighborhood identity, including **Policy N-G.20**. This policy is intended to preserve specific character defining elements of neighborhoods to promote a strong sense of place for residents. The contravention of the intent of these standards cannot be justified adequately in accordance with other findings for a variance and is therefore inconsistent with this policy.

There are no identified policies that would support this request, including policies for sustainability related to vehicle charging stations. This is based on the fact that there is a viable alternative that would conform with code requirements. Therefore, Staff is not able to meet **General Review Criteria and Consideration No. 1** which requires consistency with the Master Plan.

Public and Stakeholder Engagement: No concerns were identified from the external agency comments that were received for this application. The project is scheduled to be heard at the Ward 2 Neighborhood Advisory Board meeting on March 18, 2025. A courtesy notice was sent out to surrounding property owners upon initial submission of the project and four comments were received: One in opposition, two in support, and a statement from the property owner (**Exhibit C**). Any future comments will be forwarded to the Planning Commission as they are received.

Recommended Conditions of Approval: Staff recommends the following conditions should the Planning Commission approve the variance request. All conditions shall be met to the satisfaction of Development Services Department staff, unless otherwise noted.

1. The project shall comply with all applicable City codes, plans, reports, materials, etc., as submitted. In the event of a conflict between said plans, reports, materials and City codes, City codes in effect at the time the application is submitted, shall prevail.
2. The owner or developer shall apply for a building permit or business license for the entire project within 18 months of the date of approval of the variance review application and maintain the validity of that permit, or the variance approval shall be null and void.
3. Prior to the issuance of any permit, the applicant shall attach a copy of the final approval letter. The approval letter shall accompany a narrative that describes how the requested permit addresses each of the approved conditions of approval.
4. The applicant, developer, builder, property owner, or business proprietor, as applicable, shall continuously maintain a copy of this approval letter on the project site during the construction and operation of the project/business. The project approval letter shall be posted or made readily available upon demand by City staff.

Findings:

General Review Criteria and Considerations: The decision-making body shall review all development applications for compliance with the applicable general review criteria stated below.

- (1) Consistency with the Reno Master Plan: The proposed development shall be consistent with the Reno Master Plan. The decision-making authority:
 - a. Shall weigh competing plan goals, policies, and strategies; and
 - b. May approve an application that provides a public benefit even if the development is contrary to some of the goals, policies, or strategies in the Reno Master Plan.
- (2) Compliance with Title 18: The proposed development shall comply with all applicable standards in this Title, unless the standard is lawfully modified or varied. Compliance with these standards is applied at the level of detail required for the subject submittal.
- (3) Mitigates Traffic Impacts: The project mitigates traffic impacts based on applicable standards of the City of Reno and the Regional Transportation Commission.
- (4) Provides Safe Environment: The project provides a safe environment for pedestrians and people on bicycles.
- (5) Rational Phasing Plan. If the application involves phases, each phase of the proposed development contains all of the required streets, utilities, landscaping, open space, and other improvements that are required to serve or otherwise accompany the completed phases of the project, and shall not depend on subsequent phases for those improvements.

Variance: In addition to meeting the approval criteria in Section 18.08.304(e), Approval Criteria Applicable to all Applications, the following findings shall be made prior to granting a variance:

- (1) The property is characterized by an extraordinary or exceptional situation or condition, such as exceptional narrowness, shallowness, or shape, or it has exceptional topographic conditions at the time of enactment of the regulations;
- (2) The strict application of the regulation would result in peculiar and exceptional practical difficulties to, or exceptional and undue hardships upon, the owner of the property;
- (3) Granting of the variance will not be materially detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare, or injurious to property or improvements in the vicinity; and

- (4) The proposed variance is consistent with the intent and purpose of this Title per Chapter 18.01 Article 2, Purpose.

Attachments:

Exhibit A – Case Maps

Exhibit B – Site Plan

Exhibit C – Public Comment