

From: [Birgitta Bower](#)
To: [Luis Topete](#); katie@fatpenstudios.com; [Kristin Bradley](#)
Cc: [MCC](#); [Planning Commission](#)
Subject: Development Portola/Alameda 2
Date: Monday, August 5, 2024 1:19:49 PM
Attachments: [Development PortolaAlameda 2.pdf](#)

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CONCERNING: PLN2024-00141

Dear Design Review Committee,

The proposed plan does not only concern **167 Portola Avenue**, but also the immediate neighbors: **157 Portola** and **580 The Alameda**. All 3 plan to add 2nd stories according to the proposed project.

580 The Alameda was built in 2023 after going through Design Reviews in 2020. They changed the original design from a 2 story to a single story. Katie Kostiuk was then the architect on the Design Review Committee, now she is the architect for this project. The other committee members have changed, and we think it is important that they know why the neighborhood at the time opposed a second story at **580 The Alameda**, as the bulk of it would change the neighborhood. Lisa Ketcham is still a Planning Board Commissioner and we are sure she remembers it. It is important to see a project in context.

Because of the exceptional scope of this project we have these comments in the attached pdf:

Page 2 is a map for clarity for people who don't know the neighborhood

Pages 3-5 comment on the 3 houses mentioned in the project and how it would impact the neighborhood if all three would have 2 stories.

Pages 6-8 comment on PLN2024-00141

Pages 9-13 comment on how this project is a good example of how the absence of story poles makes it impossible to gauge the impact of a project, and obstructs the original purpose of a design review.

Thank you for reading and hearing our concerns,
Birgitta and Ben Bower, 545 The Alameda, 10-year residents.

Development of 3 properties on the southwest corner of the Portola/ The Alameda intersection

167 Av Portola : PLN2024-00141
157 Avenue Portola
580 The Alameda

Comments prepared by Birgitta and Ben Bower, 545 The Alameda, El Granada for the Design Review Committee meeting on August 8, 2024 reviewing the plans for PLN2024-00141

● Built within the last 5 years



A proposal for 3 houses adding 2nd stories and changing a neighborhood

This project is worrisome since what is proposed is not just an expansion of a small 1948 cottage on a standard lot, but it also envisions the addition of second stories to the 2 neighboring houses built last year as single stories with variances because of substandard lots. Katie Kostiuik writes:

“Both residences on each side of this project have expressed their intent to add second stories to their single-story homes.”

“Attention has been paid to ensure our window placement and second floor balcony do not impact privacy of the homes located on 157 Avenue Portola and 580 The Alameda. The designs were reviewed by each Owner with the understanding that there are second story additions planned for both homes, and everyone has acted in good faith to collaborate about privacy and views.”

“The proposed Coastal Scandinavian design may seem large in contrast to the adjacent buildings, but in the overall context of the neighborhood and understanding the intent for two-story additions on both sides, we feel confident ...”

We don't know how far along the plans are for the neighboring houses. Our neighbor Jim Kochman chatted with Kristin Bradley who said they feel good about their project and have already had 'a good meeting' with the Design Review. That sounds like a violation of **the Brown Act**, so maybe the Thursday meeting is a mere formality?

167 Portola initially included the two properties that are next to it. The owner didn't get the price they wanted so it was split up into one standard size lot and two substandard lots on the sides.

The small lots were bought up by Robert Moules of Half Moon Bay, and architect Sean Freitas, Rocklin, CA. They drew the plans for what became **157 Portola** and **580 the Alameda**. Originally, they wanted a 23', and a 28' high, 2-story-houses on the substandard lots.

The initial plan for **580 The Alameda** caused a great deal of concern due to the 2-story size on a substandard corner lot at the top of an incline. The owner wanted 3' setbacks instead of 5' on the side and 3' instead of 10' for the side facing The Alameda. We, the neighbors on the opposite side of The Alameda (5 households), as well as the coastal community at large, voiced opposition for the bulkiness. The first design was not recommended by the Design Review, nor the second. The project was then scaled down to a single story which passed without objections from the community.

Construction on **157 Portola** and **580 The Alameda** was finished early 2023. **580 The Alameda** was apparently finally sold last month.

The **167 Portola** house would have been totally dwarfed by the original plans for two-story buildings on either side of it. The new owners of **167 Portola** now want to expand their cottage and add a second floor. They have a full-size lot and it's understandable that they want a bigger house and garage.

What is less understandable is that they appear to have entered into an understanding with their neighbors: they too will be entitled to second stories, even though their projects, with generous variances to make their lots buildable, were approved based on the single story design.

It is nice that nextdoor neighbors can negotiate with each other, but any building involves more than the immediate next door neighbors and here it seems that the community is getting a 3 for 1. **167 Portola** is using **580 The Alameda** and **157 Portola's** 2-story plans to justify what the architect herself calls "*large in contrast to adjacent buildings*"; they are piggy backing on **167 Portola** to get a second story that they couldn't do originally. Meanwhile the neighborhood is getting an oversized corner that isn't balanced by the other 3 corners.

Even with **167 Portola** rebuilt as a 2-story, it would not justify having **580 The Alameda** present a hulking mass fronting The Alameda. Those objections still remain.

PLN 2024-00141

Katie Kostiuik of Fat Pen Studios, Inc. is a talented, local architect and we think her design looks mostly good. She was also a member of The Design Review Committee 4 years ago when the **580 The Alameda** and **157 Portola** were discussed, so she is well aware of how upset the community was. For **167 Portola** she has made sure to check off the design standards so the project conforms to Design Guidelines of which she is an expert.

As noted, Daniel Burnham famously designed El Granda. He envisioned (though he never visited) the slope up the hill making a natural amphitheater with views of the ocean from every 25 feet wide lot with a vacation cottage for weekend San Franciscans arriving by the Ocean Shore Railroad. Portola Avenue is the center spike. Burnham most certainly didn't envision the RS3 designation allowing for 36 feet tall buildings, nor was he responsible for planting blue gum eucalyptus along the boulevards and all over Quarry Park. To use the 'towering Eucalyptus trees', as Kostiuik writes, as an excuse for whatever height of a new building seems a tad disingenuous, it was a very unfortunate choice of tree that the community now has to endure and live in fear of.

The design for the new **167 Portola** house is called “Coastal Scandinavian”.

I’m Swedish and when it comes to houses I think we are most famous for our “små röda stugor”, little red cottages. We have a great archipelago with little villages of old houses with gables and tangerine orange clay tiles.



The only thing in the proposed design that is reminiscent of the Swedish archipelago houses to me is the gable.



We wish that the current design of the roof could be lowered to lessen the impact for us on The Alameda and Palma who will have the view of the ocean replaced with grey roofs. The option of a slightly slanted roof like these newly built houses at the Alameda intersection would harmonize with the neighborhood and reduce bulkiness.



629 The Alameda, sits at kitty corner corner from the project in question



149 Portola, next to 157 Portola.

We feel that **167 Portola** is a full-size lot that can support a 2-story building. Due to the lack of story poles, we don't know what the impact of the current design will have on the massing of the neighborhood or the view for people on The Alameda and Palma. But it seems that the 14'8" second story ceiling height could be lowered 5 feet to reduce the effect it will have.

We live in an amphitheater, and it is neighborly not to wear too big of a hat, so to speak. (We had Monterey cypresses as a privacy wall in our backyard when we moved in. We removed them, planted smaller trees and that gave our uphill neighbors a new view that they appreciated).

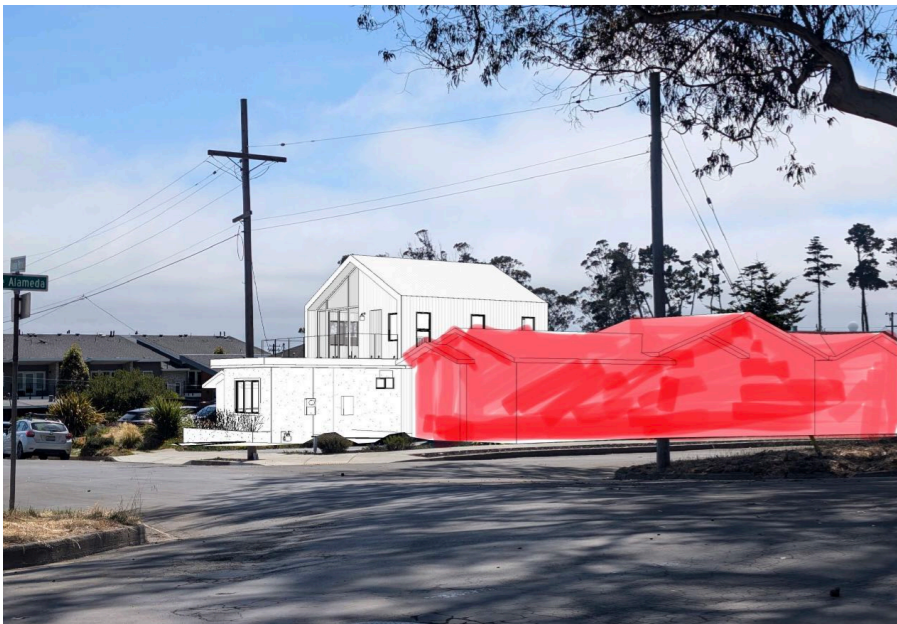
We understand that roof solar panels are now a requirement so it would be helpful if they were included and shown in the plan too. The neighbor at **149 Portola** had their panels lie flat on the roof to make as little impact as possible for the neighbors above them.

We feel that **157 Portola** and **580 The Alameda** are narrow, substandard lots that required variances in order to be built, so they should not be allowed additional second stories.

No Storypoles is a disservice to the community and not in line with the idea of what a Design Review Committee was supposed to protect.

It is extremely regrettable if the DRC and the County have given up on the story poles.

I know that in 2020 the DRC was for them and recognized that story poles are invaluable for the community to recognize the true impact of a proposed project. The current project is a good case in point. This photo is the only view we get. A physical representation with story poles makes it plain for everyone in the neighborhood to appreciate the proposed **28 feet height of the building.**



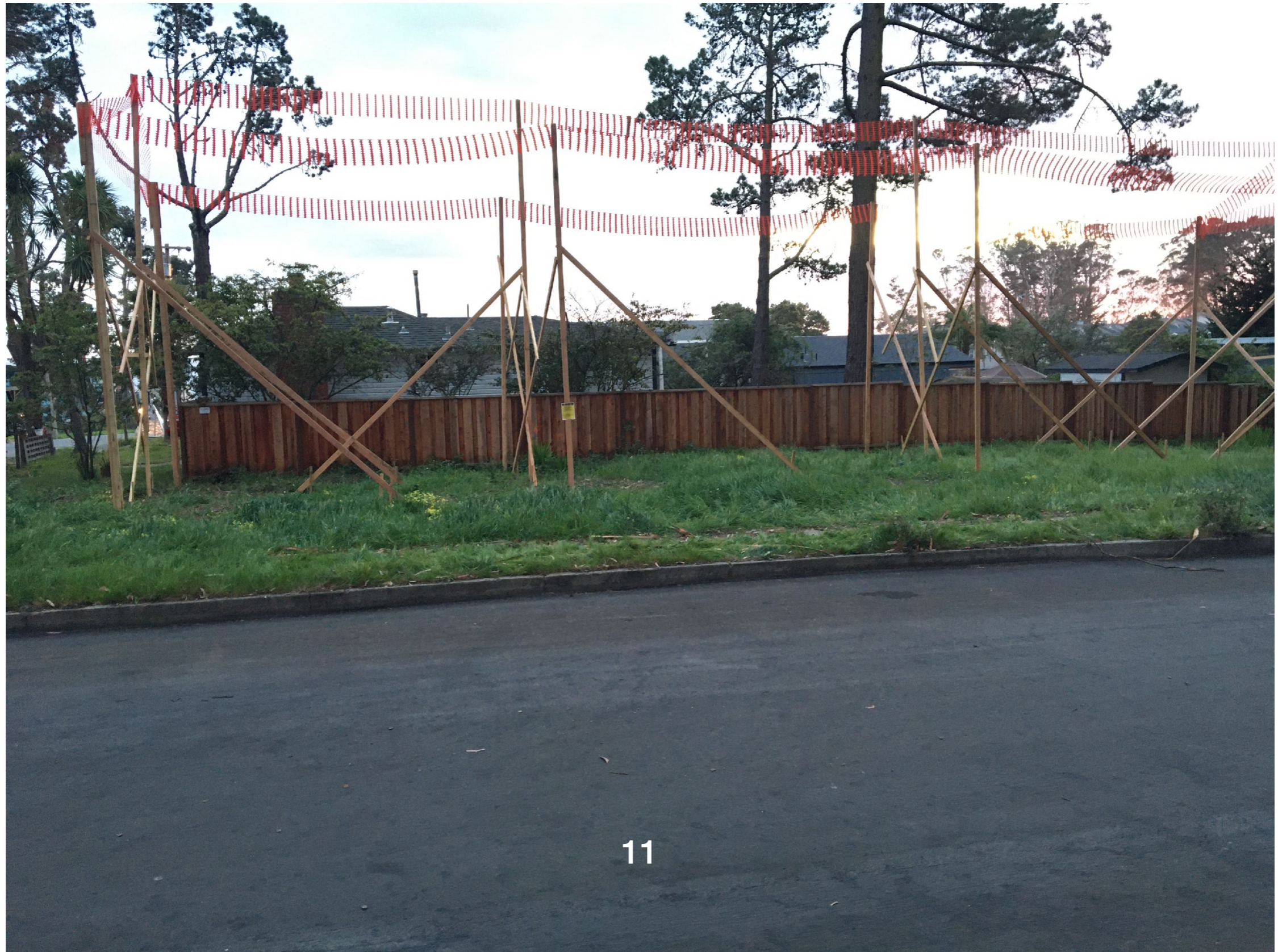
Story poles gives a 360° appreciation. If you live on the Alameda or Palma or further up you don't know what the impact is without story poles.

See the following slides of story poles for 580 The Alameda (colored in red here with current height of **16** feet). It was originally designed as a **23 foot** building. You can see what that would have looked like on the following pages.



This is what the owner and architect of **580 The Alameda** originally proposed. It was protested by the neighbors as well as the community at large for its bulkiness and for not respecting setbacks. It was not recommended by the DRC, and neither was the next two story version. The third proposal was a single story and all neighbors were happy.

See the next slides for how the size was illustrated with the story poles. It's a far superior way to determine impact from all sides and angles. The lack of story poles for the current project makes it hard or impossible to understand where the roofline will end up from the perspective of people living on the other side of the Alameda and all around.







Luis Topete

From: Birgitta Bower <bowerbirgitta@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, August 7, 2024 2:56 PM
To: Luis Topete
Cc: Cissy (Cecilia) and Jimi Baloian
Subject: PLN2024-0141

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(My neighbor Cissy Baloian asked me to forward this on her behalf)

CRDC: file #PLN2024-0141
Parcel 047-208-110
167 ave portola el granada

My home is next door to the north of the Bower's , 541 the Alameda. I pay taxes for a filtered ocean view. I have already lost my frontal ocean view to the Maverick's apt building because I didn't have Ben & Birgitta's to research it for me ; and now my ocean view to the south is in jeopardy.

Since the property at 167 Portola is on a standard lot, all I can do is pray & ask of the new owners that they be cognizant of their neighbors and design a flatter, lower roofline as the Bower's document suggests.

We also hope that the adjacent neighbors to 167 Portola do not want to add second stories as the properties at 157 Portola and at 580 The Alameda are on substandard lots. Also, the design for a second story on the 580 The Alameda property has already been rejected by the CDRC and it was only accepted as a 1 story structure.

So again, I ask the new neighbors to be considerate of the rest of us and design their roof with the least damage to our view as possible. Not only does this affect the ambience of our daily lives; but it diminishes our property values.

We all know how much new development has occurred in El Granada. What scares me is that that no one is looking out for how this affects the life style of the long term residents, or the natural beauty of the landscape which made El Granada the Jewel of the Coast!

Thank you,
Cecelia Baloian
541 the alameda
El granada

Luis Topete

From: Rebecca Katkin <rebecca@katkinarchitecture.com>
Sent: Wednesday, August 7, 2024 4:50 PM
To: Luis Topete
Subject: 167 Avenue Portola letter of support

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Hello Mr. Topete,

I am an El Granda resident, architect, and former CDRC committee member, writing to express my support for the proposed residential addition at 167 Avenue Portola, being reviewed at the August CDRC hearing. The design is elegant, and bridges the historic and current development trends in our community well; it blends a modern aesthetic with traditional roof forms and scale. The total area is modest; the massing steps in significantly at the second floor; the facades are well articulated, both volumetrically and materially. The siting seems sensitive to the adjacent properties privacy and views.

This project will be a great addition to this central block of Portola Avenue, and I think the demonstration of scale overstates its impact on the skyline there. Understanding there are second story ADUs already in permitting for the adjacent property at 165 Portola, this proposed design should be right in line with their height.

I hope the committee approves the project at today's hearing.

my best regards to the committee members and staff,
Rebecca

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Principal

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