

Palo Alto Council's Final OK Came After Multi Year Process, Timothy Kassouni Says

Timothy Kassouni reflects on length of Architectural Review Board case

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, UNITED STATES, November 30, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- When developers Jaime and Elizabeth Wong proposed creating a mixed-use building on 425 University Ave. in downtown Palo Alto in 2014, they faced an onslaught of opposition from residents. After winning a conditional approval in 2017 and completing several additional revisions, they finally received the final approval in December 2018. Attorney Timothy Kassouni represented the Wongs throughout the process.

"The Council finally approved the project in one of their last actions in 2018," said Timothy Kassouni. The Wongs had undergone several rounds of revisions with four different architects and dozens of public hearings. Council had conditionally approved the project in February 2017, and the Wongs went through several hearings and meetings before city officials finally determined they had met all the conditions to proceed. The 28,547-square-foot, four-story structure will have residential, retail, office, and parking space.

Residents had criticized the Wongs' original designs in public hearings as being out of character with the surrounding neighborhood of Victorian townhomes, too large relative to the narrow streets, and not helping the city's housing crunch with its large luxury apartments. The Wongs, however, adjusted the project in response to the feedback from residents and the Architectural Review Board. Among the changes were a different exterior appearance and a reduction of its square footage, including the residential [space in the building, said Timothy Kassouni](#).

When the council conditionally approved one of the Wong's options in 2017, they specified that the Wongs do three things to gain final approval. They were to add a decorative design to the exterior wall, improve the landscaping plan, and add "craftsmanship-related detail" to the outside. The Wongs made several improvements. These included adding a sun screen on the first floor, window screens on the second, and a modified balcony on the third floor. The Architectural Review Board, however, decided they had not complied, and Planning Director Jonathan Lait recommended that the project not receive final approval.

"I filed numerous letters on behalf of the Wongs detailing biases on the Architectural Review Board and pointing out that the board was stonewalling and basing its decision on previous opposition to the project," said Timothy Kassouni. "We planned to sue if we didn't receive a fair

review. The Architectural Review Board was to base their approval only on whether we met the conditions and not on previous opposition," he said. Lait changed his mind and recommended approval through a memo sent just before the city council meeting. With Lait's support memo in hand, the Council gave the final OK.

"I'm pleased we were able to get the final approval, but I believe the process should have been faster and fairer," said Timothy Kassouni. The Wongs felt as if the goalposts kept moving. They would comply with one directive, only to then be given another." Many council members also indicated that the rules were subjective and arbitrary.

"Despite all the obstacles, we were able to move forward with the project," Timothy Kassouni said. "I am very pleased that we found a solution that works for the Wongs and the city. The project will help the city's economy," he said.

[Timothy Kassouni is the managing partner of Kassouni Law](#), which has offices in Sacramento and Los Angeles. He founded the firm in 2009 based on his belief that property rights and personal freedom are intertwined. He specializes in land use, constitutional property rights, business, construction, real estate, and appellate law. He has considerable litigation experience at all levels of the court, including the U.S. Supreme Court, the California Supreme Court, the California Court of Appeal, and the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. His work in land use, appeals, business, and property rights law has set precedents throughout California.

[Timothy Kassouni was born in New York](#) but spent parts of his childhood in the California Central Valley and Los Angeles. He works with clients from all walks of life, whether small farmers or large developers, to defend their land use and property rights.

Timothy Kassouni is a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley and Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. Before he founded Kassouni Law, he completed a judicial externship at the California Supreme Court. He worked as a postgraduate fellow for the Pacific Legal Foundation, as deputy district attorney in Sacramento County, and as legal director of the Zumbrun Law Firm in Sacramento. He has been voted one of Sacramento's best lawyers by his peers.

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