

Would Smaller Be Better?

Lafayette's Planning Commission Finds that You Can't Please all of the People, all of the Time

By Andy Scheck

There have been hearings, design changes and presentations, and yet the Planning Commission was unable to reach a consensus last week on the proposed multi-unit residential condominium project at 3235 Mt. Diablo Ct.

Although the design was reduced from an original 40 units to 28, contained within 2 stories over parking on 2 acres of land, the building still appears poised to be a massive structure in comparison to the single-family homes nearby.

Joe Bologna, architect with Hollman - Bologna, Architecture & Planning, Inc., Walnut Creek, presented the design changes along with an exhibition of maps, pictures, landscape studies and a model of the site. Design changes were incorporated to address concerns expressed by the Commission at an earlier hearing. Some architectural elements came out and the number of units was dramatically reduced. None of the Planning Commissioners was satisfied with the design changes and no one could put a finger on exactly what was expected or what further changes could be made in order for the Commission to reach an easy decision.

The proposed development would bring a multiple housing project into Lafayette, which is on the city's "to-do list." It is considered a Low Density Multiple-Family Residential construction at 14 dwelling units to the acre. The biggest struggle is that the zoning has to be changed from Single-Family to Planned Unit Development and objectors are concerned that this could lower the bar for other projects to come.

During the public hearing session, residents and the Homeowners Council voiced their concerns about the development. The main concerns are about the size of the building and the potential impact on environmental, drainage, traffic and noise.

A visibility study illustrated how much of the development could be seen both immediately after construction and also after 10 years when the landscaping around the building has grown tall enough to shield much of the structure from direct view. Tom Chastain, a commissioner who likes the proposed underground parking, would prefer to make the development "invisible" because of its design and not because it will be hidden behind trees after some point. The redesign which reduced the number of units also eliminated a standout roof section for penthouse units. It also increased the setbacks to some single-home properties. Not reduced was the number of underground parking spaces.

In an ambiguous conclusion about the new development, the Commission could not come up with reasonable improvements to the existing design that would satisfy both the Commission and the public. It is now up to City staff to come up with a recommendation, and up to the City Council to decide if some of the people will be pleased some of the time; should this additional housing be built, or not.



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