

# To Be or Not To Be City Wrestles With Condominium Project

By Cathy Tyson



View of the site for the proposed "Lafayette Park Terrace" from Pleasant Hill Rd

Concerns ruled the day at last week's City Council meeting regarding the proposed 28 unit condominium project, Lafayette Park Terrace, located on Mt. Diablo Court, near Blodgett's Abbey Carpet. Lafayette Properties, the applicant and owner was looking for final approval of this much-contested project. Greg Wolff, Senior Planner with the City, got the public hearing started with a review of the many, many hoops the project has jumped through thus far, over a dozen hearings spread over a year's time, 154 public comment letters, and more.

The project has changed considerably already due to citizen and city concerns. Originally it was 40 units, the current plan is 28 units on two levels with parking underneath. The overall size has shrunk, from 52,000 square feet to 36,000 square feet. According to architect Joseph Bologna, it is as small as possible, the building is compact and low on the site, and the average height was adjusted to 35 feet. Landscaping calls for planting 82 new trees and keeping as much of the mature vegetation as possible around the periphery of the site.

Public comment at the meeting ran two to one against the project. Concerns included unhappiness with changing the General Plan to accommodate the necessary re-zoning and grading 28,000 cubic yards of earth. Many neighbors living in adjacent single-family homes and multi-unit buildings didn't want a large building in their backyard, blocking their views. Randall Castro said, among other things, the project was too large and gave a petition with 100 signatures to the Council. Those in favor cited additional relatively affordable housing the city sorely needs, a smaller footprint than twelve single-family homes, and a senior-friendly project.

Because the Planning Commission was deadlocked three to three at their last

meeting, the matter was sent to the City Council to decide. The Planning Commission found that they couldn't fully support it, but couldn't deny it either. Size, bulk and mass were their main concerns. They were in agreement in their support to change the zoning from Medium Density Single-Family Residential (up to six units per acre) to Low Density Multi-Family Residential (up to 17 units per acre). For this two-acre parcel, that means a developer could have built 12 single-family homes, but if approved would be able to build a maximum of 34 condominium units. This came up later in the evening when neighbors complained about the size and mass of the project, but were asked if they preferred having 12 separate homes instead.

In the end, after hearing from Wolff, Bologna, numerous concerned citizens, and a land use lawyer, the City Council still had reservations. Vice Mayor Mike Anderson suggested sending the matter back to the Design Review Commission to see if concerns of height, bulk and mass had been remedied in the current version of the plan. Council Member Brandt Andersson was concerned about increases in density and height; in addition he was also hesitant to change the General Plan. Council Member Carl Anduri preferred a much smaller project, around twelve units. Mayor Carol Federighi was, "still not entirely comfortable with the project...I'm not ready tonight to endorse it or cut it off. My recommendation is to send it back to the Planning Commission." Council Member Don Tatzin was not in attendance.

The City Council voted to send the project back to the Planning Commission and directed the developer to revise its plans to reduce the size of the project.

In related news, The Woodbury, an 80-unit luxury condominium project, on the other end of town near the Veterans Building, was unanimously approved, according to Niroop Srivatsa, Planning and Building Manager.



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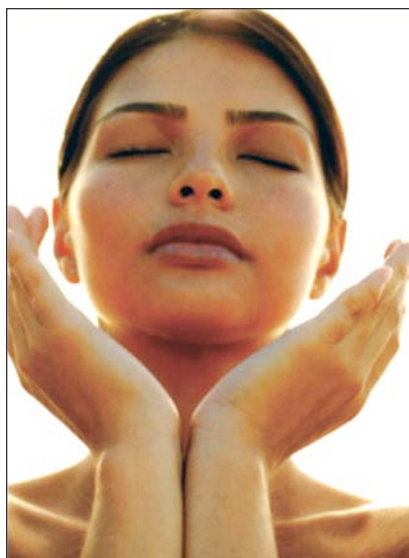
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