

How Big is Too Big?

By Cathy Tyson

Way back in 1981, Lafayette's Planning Commission approved a six parcel subdivision on Cosso Court, off of Happy Valley Road. At that time there were conditions of approval, to paraphrase, 90% of the net lot not be covered with buildings, at least 70% of the lot shall have a permeable surface, and homes and garages shall not have a combined ground footprint of greater than 3,000 square feet.

A lot has changed in Happy Valley in 27 years; wealthy homeowners may be interested in something just a bit larger than 3,000 square feet. At last week's Planning Commission meeting Talon Design Group, representing the owners of a Cosso Court lot, asked for a change of conditions for their proposed two-story 8,919 square foot gross floor area home. Other homes along the court have asked for and received "footprint exceptions" to allow for more square footage.

Although the 1.129 acre site

seems large, it's considered a highly constrained lot, "due to setbacks, tree driplines, a sanitary sewer easement and the creek setback requirement," according to a Staff Report.

Additionally, a very large mature oak tree is right in the middle of the center buildable area of the lot. Commissioners had a lengthy discussion about moving it, or cutting it down and imposing substantial mitigation measures, planting more trees on the property and possibly contributing to city in-lieu fees.

The City Engineer is concerned with drainage impacts, the amount of hardscape – particularly the driveway, even taking into account the pervious nature of interlocking pavers suggested for the project. He also recommends reducing the building footprint size.

The bottom line after the applicant's lawyer spoke, staff reports, commissioner discussion, and public input, is that the matter

will be continued until July 3, 2008 in order for the applicants to meet with the City Engineer to discuss the requested issues.

In related news, an adhoc committee is working on a house size ordinance and will be meeting this week to finish up this proposal. The original concept was to limit the size of new construction to the average size of a number of homes adjacent to the property. According to a reliable source, once the committee's work is done the proposal will have to go through an extensive public review and input process before ultimately going to the Council for consideration.