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Significant Development Proposed for Christmas Tree Lot

By Cathy Tyson



Pool view image of The Terraces of Lafayette Courtesy of Norm Dyer, Loving and Campos Architects.

Is Lafayette ready for a 315 unit apartment complex spread among fourteen buildings with over 500 parking spaces at the Christmas tree lot site near Acalanes High School? If approved, The Terraces would be the largest project in Lafayette's history. City staff just received the application from the owner of the 22-acre parcel, the Dettmer family, and is reviewing it for completeness. Building the proposed development hinges getting the necessary permits from the Planning Commission and the Design Review Committee.

In April of last year, after months of meetings and heated public comment, the City Council directed staff to down-zone the property to a lower density zoning category, LR-5 "rural residential" up to .2 dwelling units per acre, or one house per five acres. Prior to that, it had been zoned to allow a maximum of 35 dwelling units per acre in Administrative/Professional/Office/Multifamily Residential classification (APO).

Many residents at that time made it very clear to the City Council they were not in favor of any development on that parcel - citing traffic concerns and preserving views at this gateway location.

Although the City Council ordered staff to rezone the land to a lower density category, "The developer submitted the application before the rezoning process got underway," said City Manager Steven Falk in his Friday Summary.

"There is no typical or required time to complete a rezoning - it depends on the parcel(s), land use, environmental considerations and staff resources," said Ann Merideth, Special Projects Manager for the City of Lafayette. "The applicant is proposing to develop the project under the current zoning Administrative / Professional / Office."

"Once the application is deemed complete, the project will have to undergo public review by the Design Review Committee and the Planning Commission," said Meredith. She added the application will need to obtain a Land Use Permit, Hillside Development Permit and Tree Removal Permit. "An example of a land use finding is the project is not detrimental to the health, safety and general welfare of the city," said Merideth.

"We're excited about the project, it offers a great diversity of housing that will be a community benefit," said attorney Allan Moore who represents the property owner. "Not everyone can afford a single family home in Lafayette. We respect the process and want to work with neighbors and community groups"

In a letter sent to the City with the building application, Moore spelled out the history of the property, "Since 2001 the City of Lafayette has made intermittent attempts to change the General Plan and zoning designation." Having not heard from the City Council since July of last year, and with a record of stop and start administrative hearings, and reversing its own decision, Moore concludes, "the City has treated the Dettmer family in a terribly unfair manner over the ten year period...After all of this time, the Dettmer family has a right to move forward with a project application consistent with current General Plan and zoning designations."

Although no one is arguing that property owners don't have rights, the timing of this application seems odd in contrast with Moore's earlier statements. In the February 17, 2010 edition of this paper we reported that at a recent City Council meeting Moore stated that the Dettmer family was not proposing a project on the site. But in September 2010, we reported Moore said it would be unreasonable not to allow the family to develop the property, "and we are

exploring all options." For more information on the project, including detailed architectural plans, go to their website www.terracesoflafayette.com.

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