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Planning Commission Denies Permit Application for "Large" Change in Plans

By Cathy Tyson

The Lafayette Planning Commission recently decided that a proposed 10,388 square foot house is really not the same as a 5,900 square foot house even if it's at the same exact location as the original request - apples and oranges.

Despite convincing arguments from attorney David Bowie representing the land owners, "this is essentially the same project from a massing standpoint that you originally approved," the Planning Commissioners disagreed and voted unanimously that this version does not conform to the original approval.

Bowie was referring to an approval on March 20, 2008 for a Phase I Hillside Development Permit for a new 5,900 square foot, one and a half story home on a vacant fifteen acre parcel on Monticello Road. In late 2008, the architect for the property owners at that time, Richard Bartlett, submitted a Phase 2 application that covered design and the impacts of the project approved in Phase I, but that time around the project grew to two stories and 7,171 square feet. Turns out, that application was deemed incomplete in December of 2008. Fast forward two years and the land owners, Steve and Linda Wight, have a new architect, Andre Pierce with Resort Design Architects, who submitted brand new and greatly expanded plans for a lovely but large 10,388 square foot home.

"The issue is off-site visual impact" for the Phase 1 approval, said Bowie, pointing out the proposed project is nestled into the saddle of the expansive property and is virtually concealed from neighbors. While it's true that in the newest incarnation only a small portion of chimney is visible, less of the home than in the original drawings, the overall mass of the project is significantly larger.

Many neighbors were concerned about the proposed project. Don Walket said, "Residents feel stunned - this doubles the size of the previous project." Bill Bucher, President of the Happy Valley Improvement Association, spoke in support of the staff recommendation to go back to Phase 1.

Speaking for his clients the Wight family, Bowie said he is currently "reviewing options" with the City and these matters, "tend to ultimately work out well. I think this house is perfectly sited, very gracious, and it deserves due consideration."

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