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Eden Housing Receives Enthusiastic Reception from Planning Commission

By Diana LaScala-Gruenewald

Eden Housing returned to the Planning Commission in late July to pitch a revised design for the planned affordable senior housing facility on Irwin Way—the new plans were approved by the Commission in a four-to-one vote.

The more reserved conceptualization features a facility that will be set further back from Orinda Way, will blend in with the surrounding buildings and trees, and will house sixty-seven independent seniors.

Project Director Woody Karp, with architects Sean Reynolds and John Thatch, represented Eden Housing at the meeting. They presented the design modifications, and addressed several written communications that they had received from community members.

Karp also requested that they be granted three to five years of approval by the Commission

rather than just one; the additional time will aid Eden in securing funding for the project.

Some residents expressed lingering concerns. Notable topics included the installation of a handrail on the proposed Irwin Way sidewalk and the necessity of maintaining reasonable noise levels in the new living units during events in Orinda Community Park.

The majority of commissioners were favorably impressed. “The applicant has been truly engaged in listening to our concerns about this project,” said Commission chair Louise Adamson. “The design isn’t perfect, but it’s really close.”

All four approving members did note, however, that the housing project was a very important one, and would require continued discussion and collaboration moving forward. (Commissioners Steve Dathe and Bob Jungbluth were not

in attendance.)

Commissioner Nick Kosla, the lone dissenter, continued to be concerned about the size of the project. He feels that the tree cover from all directions is insufficient for such a large building, and worries that the community park will lose its much cherished “woody” feel, especially in winter.

The terms of the Commission’s approval require Eden to install a handrail on Irwin Way, investigate the issue of noise inside the new living units, and reconsider the landscaping near the park and in front of the proposed parking lot on Orinda Way. It also granted Eden’s request for a three-year approval, with the condition that the project leaders report to the Commission each year.

Eden Housing will now begin to search for funding for the project. Construction will begin when complete funding is secured.

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