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Published November 19th, 2014

Proposed Saranap Village Project Concerns Lafayette Residents

By Cathy Tyson



Saranap as it appears today.

Source: MBH Architects Saranap Village EIF



This conceptual rendering shows what Saranap might look like in the future.

Does Lafayette have much say about a project outside of its borders? That was the question before the City Council on Nov. 10 regarding the 4.6 acre proposed project on Boulevard Way in Saranap, an unincorporated area just east of Lafayette.

Mayor Don Tatzin called Lafayette "an interested party, but we have no role in the decision making process." Because the proposed development by Lafayette-based Hall Equities Group is dealing with Contra Costa County for a general plan amendment, rezoning, major subdivision and final development plans, the City of Lafayette can only highlight its many concerns to county planners. So far, the county has ignored correspondence.

"Potentially significant impacts on the City are anticipated," noted a staff report on the project. Months ago city staffers reviewed the Notice of

Preparation from the County Office of Conservation

and Development. Michael Cass, associate planner, said that in staff's opinion, the county has neglected to study a majority of issues, referring to items brought up in the draft Environmental Impact Report, finding "numerous deficiencies" and "inaccurate conclusions" in the report.

According to the developer, the project is designed to create a lively village atmosphere embodying high-quality architecture that increases the walkability of the neighborhood, by redeveloping underused sites to create a neighborhood focal point that would include shopping areas, a restaurant, a grocery store, coffee shop, micro bank, bar/nightclub and fitness club along with condominiums for purchase and apartments for rent.

It's an ambitious plan, explained Mark Hall, CEO of Hall Equities Group at the recent city council meeting. "We feel like we need a bold project," adding, "it's an opportunity to change the character of the neighborhood for the better."

Specifically, Saranap Village is a mixed-use development, comprised of up to 235 housing units, 30,000 square feet of retail and restaurant use, and over 14,000 square feet for a boutique, gym, and amenities for the project's residents - spread among four buildings around the intersection of Boulevard Way and Saranap Avenue, near the interchange of Highways 24 and 680. The developer also proposes to narrow Boulevard Way from four lanes to two and to provide substantial improvements in the sidewalks and streetscape.

Members of the public, as always, had comments to share about the project. A surprising number at the council meeting were positive in nature. David Dacus, president of the Saranap Community Association, sent out over 2,000 mailers; he estimated that two-thirds of the comments received were in support of the development.

Others were clearly against the project. One Saranap resident referred to the developer's comment about changing the character of the neighborhood, stating she liked the existing character as it currently is and called the proposed project "ridiculous and appalling." Several Lafayette residents expressed concern about the estimated 5,000 additional vehicle trips per day, the construction time of roughly one year that would drive Saranap residents through Lafayette streets, and the building heights.

With a unanimous vote by the City Council, a letter was sent out by the mayor to the county's Conservation and Development Department stating that the draft EIR fails to adequately study a number of impacts on Lafayette spelled out over six pages -a laundry list of deficiencies falling into categories that include aesthetics, population and housing, with over 20 items under the transportation and traffic heading.

The public comment period for the draft EIR ended Nov. 17. There is a public hearing on the merits of the project slated for early 2015 with the Contra Costa County Planning Commission. A copy of the draft EIR can be viewed online at www.cccounty.us/5195/Saranap-Village.

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