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Deer Hill Project Review Continues This Summer

By Cathy Tyson

Although the proposed Homes at Deer Hill includes roughly one-seventh the number of homes of the original version, concerns remain among residents and city council members about the project, which features 44 single family homes and public amenities like a much-needed sports field, parking and dog park near Acalanes High School. The project is going through a multi-meeting final review phase, with the city leaders going over environmental reports with a fine-tooth comb.

The developer, O'Brien Land Company, originally proposed the Terraces of Lafayette, a 315-unit multi-family project on the 22-acre site at the corner of Deer Hill Road and Pleasant Hill Road back in March of 2011.

Spread over several meetings, the review process will examine specific topics and, of course, allow for public comment. At the June 22 meeting, air quality was on the agenda, and mitigation measures to monitor particulate matter in the air, along with landscaping, visual screening and the roundabout. Because the site is a former quarry, Council Member Mike Anderson voiced concern about possible pockets of dust and silt that may be found when the earth is excavated. Real-time air monitoring will be used to measure particulate matter during construction, explained project manager Dave Baker.

Residential parcels would be privately owned, and a common area surrounding them would be controlled by the Homes at Deer Hill homeowners association. The City of Lafayette would own and control the athletic field, dog park and parking area. If the project is approved, the developer and the city will enter into a landscape agreement spelling out specific obligations. Since vegetation screening is so important, but considering the current drought, O'Brien is in the process of preparing a plan for irrigation water that will address this, possibly with rainwater harvesting, gray water capture and recycled water.

Transportation issues were also discussed with city engineer Tony Coe going over why a roundabout is the best solution at the project entrance: "It best satisfies goals and policies of the General Plan." Coe explained that it helps maintain the semi-rural character of the roadway and will provide a better streetscape design while slowing down traffic on Deer Hill Road, but allowing it to flow without stopping through the intersection. Other options were considered, but they are expensive and deliver a poor level of service.

Five meetings are slated to complete the review process, with presumably an up or down decision at the culmination, subject to conditions of approval. With summer vacations on the calendar, the plan is to take up the matter of future scheduling at the July 6 city council meeting, and then likely continue the review at the July 27 meeting. "We are not eager to let this drag out much longer," said Mayor Brandt Andersson. Next up to be discussed are design and architecture, water strategy, transportation and park facilities.

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