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Proposed Saranap Project Now Slightly Smaller

By Cathy Tyson



In response to community feedback and additional market research, developer Hall Equities Group has downsized their proposed mixed-use multi-building Saranap Village project, around the intersection of Boulevard Way and Saranap Avenue. Instead of the originally proposed 235 units of housing, spread out among three buildings, the developer recently unveiled a new scaled-back third generation of the project with 187 units, and also shrunk the amount of commercial leasable space by over half. In addition, excavation has been reduced by approximately 750 truckloads from the original project, and buildings A and B are from seven feet to 20 feet shorter, reducing the overall mass of the project by approximately 25 percent.

Walnut Creek-based Hall Equities Group saw the area as underused, not reaching its full potential, featuring a hodge podge of obsolete

Current development location

architecture, vacant lots and lack of commercial desirability near the Highway 680 and 24 interchange. The nondescript area along Boulevard Way adjacent to the southeastern Lafayette city limit in unincorporated Contra Costa County doesn't have a central focal point. Many of the residents in the established, mainly single-family homes surrounding the proposed project like it just the way it is now, and are concerned about the height and density of the project, along with potential traffic impacts.

The proposed Saranap Village project, first introduced in May 2013, is a cluster of three buildings - A, B, and C - centered around the intersection of Boulevard Way and Saranap Avenue. The 187 housing units will be a mix of apartments for rent and condominiums for purchase, along with street front infrastructure upgrades and retail amenities.

The developer is sensitive to neighborhood concerns, according to Erin Bell, director of Systems Management and Marketing, especially on the heels of the still under construction, massive Sufism Reoriented Sanctuary, just a few blocks down from the proposed site (see story page A2).

"We try to listen to all parties," said Alisa MacCormac, Hall Equities director of community affairs. An open house is scheduled for early September with a scale model of the current third version of the project and staff to answer questions. The exact date will be posted on the project website (www.saranapvillage.com) with detailed drawings in the near future.

The newest changes not only reduce the overall number of units, along with the mix of unit types, but more studio units are included, and three-bedroom models have been substantially cut back. More open space has been incorporated between units and a completely reconfigured stacked garage will be adjacent to the grocery store, with free shopper parking on the ground level and secured resident parking above.

"While we appreciate the changes, it's still nowhere near what we want," said Saranap Homeowners Organization President Tim Lynch. He pointed out concerns with changing the County General Plan to fit the development, which may affect other future projects, environmental issues, traffic, and dangerous angled parking wreaking havoc with bicyclists and speeding cars.

Public infrastructure along the street frontage has been improved in all of the iterations to make the proposed development more pedestrian friendly, including lots of landscaping, sidewalks and benches, with a generous, traffic-calming roundabout at the intersection of Saranap Avenue

and Boulevard Way. The developer is looking for a retail mix to serve the residents and neighbors, like an independent coffee shop, casual restaurant, and a small bank. Other changes include removing the fitness club, changing the arched sign in favor of a monument sign, and keeping the heritage oak in its current location, rather than moving it to the center of the roundabout.

There have been many public meetings on the matter, with more to follow. Contra Costa County Principal Planner Will Nelson said there was a recent zoning meeting, but the "real" hearings are not expected until early next year, as the overall review process continues.

Although the project is outside the city limits, and near freeway access, many residents worry about drivers opting to go through Lafayette, coupled with the overall size of the project dwarfing existing low-rise structures in the neighborhood.

Blink and you'd miss the tiny hamlet of Saranap. There's no welcome sign and even the vintage gas pumps at the service station on the way to Rossmoor at Tice Valley Boulevard that marked the neighborhood are now gone. The biggest landmark, aside from the Sanctuary, is popular Morucci's sandwich shop, just down the block.

More than a year ago, in April, 2014, mayor at the time, now council member Don Tatzin wrote a response to the Notice of Preparation for an Environmental Impact Report for the proposed mixed-use project. In his letter, he pointed out that the city council identified a number of critical issues to be analyzed and addressed in the Draft Environmental Impact Report including aesthetics, and a long list of traffic and transportation concerns.

To review the very lengthy Draft Environmental Impact Report, go to www.contracosta.ca.gov and type Saranap in the search box.



Building Specifics for the Third Generation of Saranap Village Building A is located on the north side of Boulevard Way (currently a vacant lot) and will feature a small grocery store, about half the size of Diablo Foods. The building went from 143 rental units to 111 units comprised of 63 studios, 27 one-bedroom and 21 two-bedroom apartments. Building B went from 62 to 52 for-sale condominiums, 11 one-bedroom, six two-bedroom townhouses, and five three-bedroom units, along with retail on the ground floor. Building C will have 24 for-sale condominiums: three one-bedroom, 15 two-bedroom and 6 three-bedroom units.

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