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Size of Saranap Development Still a Sticking Point

By Cathy Tyson

When the initial vision of the proposed Saranap Village project was unveiled in May 2013 by Walnut Creek-based Hall Equities, it received a fair amount of criticism from neighborhood residents in unincorporated Contra Costa County, just outside of Lafayette.

The developer has since downsized the project, reducing the number of housing units by 22 percent to 196 units and cut the amount of retail space in half from the original version. The project is spread over three sites around the intersection of Boulevard Way and Saranap Avenue with a traffic circle in the center, and includes infrastructure modernization, bike and pedestrian improvements. Paula Santi of the Saranap Homeowners Association says the reduction in height isn't enough. She's concerned that if this is approved it opens up the possibility of more dense, tall development on Boulevard Way and the proposed project is not in harmony with the existing neighborhood. Some neighborhood residents are still concerned about the overall size, and have no love for the bulky six-story parking garage. The tallest building has shrunk from 75 feet to 62 feet tall, which is still

almost double the allowed height in the existing zoning.

Since Saranap is in unincorporated area, it is governed by the county Board of Supervisors. There was a county hearing on Monday, June 20 on the draft environmental impact report where comments were accepted both pro and con. Principal planner Will Nelson reports that there were two people commenting in favor of the project and six people opposing the project, with more attendees in the audience.

However, he said, in general over the years he's been working on Saranap Village, he's noticed a recurrent theme - residents recognize that the area needs an upgrade, but are frustrated with the scale of the project.

The Saranap Village review will continue with a county planning hearing in September. After that, Nelson is anticipating an appeal, which will likely occur if the project is approved or denied. If it's denied, presumably the developer will appeal; if it's approved, a neighborhood group may appeal. Ultimately it will go before the Board of Supervisors sometime in November or December.

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