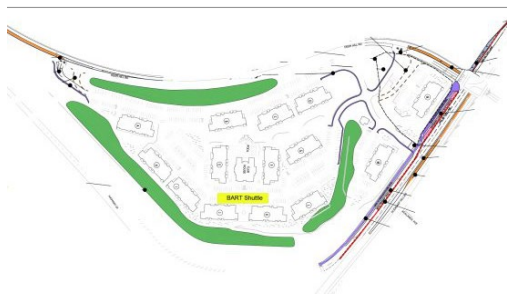


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Traffic concerns at heart of residents' objections to 315-unit development

By Pippa Fisher



Proposed Deer Hill Rd./Pleasant Hill Rd. intersection

on the future of the revised project. With the defeat of Measure L in 2018, the developer O'Brien Homes resumed the original application for the 315-unit apartment project under the process agreement.

Planning Director Greg Wolff introduced Renee Powell and Chris Kinzel of TJKM, explaining that the company prepared both the initial 2012 study for the apartments and also the 2015 study for the Homes.

Powell presented the company's key findings and mitigations for traffic along the Deer Hill/Pleasant Hill Road corridor. She said they looked at changes added since 2011, including plans regarding access to the development and driveways to improve sight lines, improved frontage with a bus dugout, sidewalks, and plans for an additional southbound "trap" lane that would begin north of the Deer Hill Road intersection - a lane dedicated to feed traffic onto the westbound entrance ramp for Highway 24. Powell said they looked at passenger loading and parking especially around the high school and at emergency vehicle response times on Pleasant Hill.

Powell addressed traffic mitigation on Deer Hill Road at Brown Avenue with signalization, and mitigation for emergency vehicle response times along Pleasant Hill Road by adding emergency vehicle signal preemption. She explained a construction management plan would address timing of construction work, and a BART shuttle would be added to address the impact on parking at the BART station.

"The bottom line of our findings is that there were no new significant traffic impacts," said Powell.

Clearly most members of the public in attendance that night did not agree as speaker after speaker spoke of the extreme congestion on that corridor and concerns for what would happen in an evacuation given the area is deemed to be high fire risk.

O'Brien Homes Project Manager Dave Baker acknowledged that the Deer Hill/Pleasant Hill Road intersection is the biggest challenge but pointed out that this development is proposed for open space, not tearing down existing businesses, near BART, and by the freeway. Baker pointed out that this development, zoned as administrative-professional office, is less than half the amount that could be developed on the site. "Where you saw problems, we saw all the opportunities." He said this site had so many positives that influenced their decision to build a multifamily complex there.

Public speaker Matt Regan, senior vice president of public policy at the Bay Area Council and an Association of Bay Area Governments representative, agreed, stating the need to build housing for Lafayette's work force. He said it would reduce traffic for people driving to their jobs in Lafayette. "Look at the big picture. House your own work force," he said.

Regan, however was in the minority and the only member of the public to speak for the project on this night. Kristen Altbaum, founder of the North East Residents For Reduced Traffic group formed to address traffic congestion along Reliez Valley Road, told the commissions that she has presented traffic relief conceptualizations, which she believed could work for a smaller development of the site. "I'm amazed that the affected parties are not getting together with the spirit of getting something there that is going to work for all residents' satisfaction," she said.

The Planning Commission held a joint meeting with the Transportation and Circulation Commission on Jan. 21 as a first look at the results of the traffic impact study report for the proposed Terraces development on Deer Hill Road.

No decision was reached at this meeting but the commissions had a chance to hear not only from traffic consultants TJKM as they presented their report, but also from members of the public who were overwhelmingly critical of the report's findings.

The Terraces, which would sit on a 22-acre parcel on Deer Hill Road, was first proposed in March 2011 but its application was suspended in 2014 in favor of alternative plans for a scaled back development of 44 single-family homes, and amenities including a dog park, playground, playing fields and a car park. Local preservationist group Save Lafayette sued the city, resulting in a referendum

Attorney Bryan Wenter, counsel for the applicant, took the opportunity to remind the room of the project alternative. "This project (the Terraces) exists today because the voters saw fit to referend the single-family homes project that could have been built," he said. He emphasized that the traffic report shows that the project will not impact traffic at Deer Hill Road.

Michael Griffiths, founder of the group Save Lafayette, which sued the city over the proposed single-family homes development, is highly skeptical of the TJKM report. "The city should never have selected TJKM to do the traffic study - TJKM has a very obvious conflict of interest, as it was recently on the developer's payroll," he said.

Griffiths says in a letter to the council that in view of this, "Save Lafayette has hired an independent transportation consulting firm to do a peer review of the new traffic study." He expects the report to be ready in a few weeks.

"We would review all materials the public bring forward," said Wolff after the meeting when asked about a further, independent study.

Recent legislation designed to address the housing crisis, limits the number of public meetings on any application to five. The next Planning Commission meeting on the subject will take place on March 16.



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