

**CITY OF SONOMA
PLANNING COMMISSION
Special MEETING
March 24, 2016**

Community Meeting Room, 177 First Street West, Sonoma, CA

MINUTES

Chair Felder called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Roll Call:

Present: Chair Felder, Comms. Wellander, Roberson, Coleman, McDonald, Cribb

Absent: Comms. Heneveld, Willers

Others
Present: Planning Director Goodison, Administrative Assistant Morris

Chair Felder stated that no new items would be heard after 10:30 p.m. unless the Planning Commission so decides. Any decisions made by the Planning Commission can be appealed within 15 days to the City Council. He reminded everyone to turn off cell phones and pagers. Comm. Roberson led the Pledge of Allegiance.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC: Anna Gomez, non-resident, requested no new development approvals until the sanitation system is repaired.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: None

CHANGES TO AGENDA ORDER: None.

CORRESPONDENCE: Late mail was received on Item 1 from Tom and Peggy Henry, Dennis and Susan McQuaid, Thomas Jones, Claudia Clerici, and Bob Mosher.

Item #1 – Public Hearing – Study session on an updated proposal for a mixed-use project at 216-254 First Street East and 273-299 Second Street East, including a hotel, restaurant, and residential units.

Applicant/Property Owner: Caymus Capital LLC

Chair Felder reviewed the guidelines pertaining to study sessions and emphasized that it is an informational meeting, so no decision will be made by the Planning Commission.

Planning Director Goodison reviewed the staff report.

Comm. Roberson inquired about the height of the existing buildings on and nearby the site.

Comm. Wellander confirmed with staff that the inclusionary units can be either in one area or scattered throughout the project, at the discretion of the Planning Commission.

Chair Felder opened the item for public comment.

JJ Abodeely, applicant/resident presented a video to illustrate the features of the First Street East project.

Doug Hillberman, project architect, reviewed site planning and design issues.

Larry Barnett, resident, gave background to gain perspective for what was intended for the site, expressing the view a commercial component was not contemplated and not appropriate. He stated that in 1996, the City Council clarified that the interim zoning ordinance in place at that time did not allow commercial uses in the area and this direction should be carried forward in the interpretation of the Northeast Planning Area provisions of the Development Code. He stated the Development Code regulates land use and that financial objectives should not be considered. He urged the Commission to look at a broader future snapshot of the area before considering changes that he considered problematic.

Regina Baker, resident, cautioned the commissioners not to approve the development until water and sewer infrastructure deficiencies are solved. She requested more consideration for the needs of residents. She disagreed with what she considered a sales pitch whereby collecting TOT revenue would benefit the community. She viewed it as using funds to pay for additional services needed to fulfill a void that was ultimately created to benefit the developer.

Ned Forrest, resident/local architect, opposed the project.

Sam Taylor, neighbor/representing North of the Mission group requested building height data from staff. His main concerns and those of the organization are with building heights, the hotel, increased traffic, and limited parking and the resulting change in the character of the neighborhood. He stated that the development of Mission Square should be accounted for in traffic projections.

Andrew Wilson, neighbor, is concerned with future deliveries, including large trucks at the hotel/restaurant, as well as the prospect of tour vans in the neighborhood.

Steven Rouse, Valley resident, felt that development of the site is inevitable and is pleased with the project amenities. In his view, the developer is willing to work with the community and the neighbors, which is a good thing.

Tom Henry, Valley resident, supported the plan. He agreed with Steven Rouse that it is an improvement to what is currently there. With regard to the issue of deliveries, he noted that as residents, everyone brings in food, postal deliveries, and other forms of traffic. Hotel units are not occupied full-time and so will generate less traffic.

David Eicher, Valley resident, showed graphs, including a powerpoint presentation, illustrating the ramifications of more traffic. In his view, the developer is underestimating the traffic generation potential of the project. He is concerned that more cars will negatively impact the tranquil environment of the neighborhood. He questioned whether the project would actually result in a net increase in TOT generation for the City. In his view, the City needs more housing, not more low-paying jobs.

Richard Peters, neighbor/architect, referred to the letter he submitted. He opposes the project because there will be a parking area/ driveway and 3-story buildings behind his home, as well

as overall impacts on the neighborhood. In his view the changes made to the project since the previous review are not positive, in particular the three-story buildings proposed along the First Street frontage. He is satisfied with the neighborhood as it is and welcomed the commissioners to take a tour of the area.

Mark Manns, resident, stated that he supports the project. In his view, Sonoma needs additional hotel rooms and he supports the proposed community pool. This would be a benefit for residents.

Pat Coleman, resident of Meadow Gardens, opposes the hotel component. She asked if the residential units would be governed by an HOA. While she did not object to residential development on the site, in her view the hotel component would detract from the sense of community for the residential units. She was concerned that the proposed residences would be used as second homes and vacation rentals. She questioned whether the occupants of the affordable units could afford the dues.

Ross Edwards, resident, felt mixed use developments benefit the community and that the project opponents were in the minority. Many of his friends and peers support the proposal, which will benefit the community as a whole. He feels that hotel rooms are needed and the pool will be a good resource.

Leslie Whitelaw, resident, recommended one or two story buildings and an independent traffic study. In her view, the three-story units would be completely out of place in the neighborhood. She is concerned that traffic generated by the project will cause problems on both Second Street East and First Street East.

Joe Diggins, resident, supported the plan and agreed with a previous speaker that a vocal minority opposed the project. In his view, the project is well designed and the hotel rooms are need. He agrees that tax revenues from the project will benefit local schools and he welcomes the proposed restaurant. He reviewed positive comments submitted by letter.

Fred Allebach, Valley resident, is of the opinion that the economic multiplier is not relevant and that the City should not rely on revenues generated from the project. He recommended that more importance be placed on sustainability/global warming issues as identified in the Climate Action 2020 plan. Any hotel component should be strictly limited to perhaps six rooms.

Vince Bennett, resident, supported the project and stated that tax revenues will support schools. In his view, the project will benefit local businesses and will create good jobs for local residents. He envisioned fewer cars because of the proximity of the development to the Plaza. In his view, the focus should be on the good of the community as a whole, not the interests of a select few.

Dana Hunter, resident/Napa winery worker, is impressed with the changes made and applauded the developer for engaging with the community and making positive revisions to the proposal in response to the concerns that were expressed. In his view, as a resident of Second Street, there are already traffic issues, but the project seems thoughtfully designed.

Anna Gomez, Valley resident, requested a sewer evaluation because of her concern with sewer capacity and water issues. She felt the project is not appropriate in Sonoma.

Bastian Schoell, Valley resident, endorsed the proposal because it would improve the City's economic vitality and the quality of life of the community. In his view the proposed residential

component is a valuable asset, as is the proposed swimming pool. He stated that the scale of the project was consistent with that of neighboring development.

Karin Skooglund, resident and member of the North of the Mission Neighborhood Association, supported the housing component but opposed the hotel and restaurant. In her view, neighbor concerns reflect the fact that local residents have a natural interest and concern in maintaining the qualities of their surroundings.

Lou Braun, resident, applauded the previous speaker and agreed that neighbors input should be carefully considered in the development review process. He agreed with Larry Barnett that a commercial component was not anticipated for this site and should not be supported.

Jim Bohar, resident, First Street West, is disappointed with the mixed use designation and guidelines as applied to the neighborhood and felt this type of proposal might start a negative trend. In his view, the commercialization of this area is not appropriate and should be rejected.

Lynda Corrado, resident, felt the project did not fit in the neighborhood since increased traffic would be problematic and privacy would be compromised. She pointed out that many speakers in favor of the proposal lived outside the city limits. In her view, the height of three story buildings was excessive and inappropriate. She would like to see story poles.

Tony Westphal, resident and business owner, supported the proposed uses for the site. He noted that potential visitors to Sonoma have to stay in a hotel in Petaluma, that adds to traffic. He feels that the housing component will be welcomed by those who work in Sonoma. He feels it is consistent with the General Plan.

Laurie Winter, resident, recognized infill projects should support housing needs and urged the commissioners to preserve the quality of the neighborhoods. She would like to ensure that any housing units are occupied as full-time residences, not as second homes. In her view, the hotel would work better with the neighborhood if it had more of a bed and breakfast scale, but she did feel that the design was well done. She respected the comments of the neighbors and encouraged the Commission to protect the qualities of the neighborhood.

Bob Blanusa, Valley resident, frequents the neighborhood and supports the proposed plan. In his view, the traffic issue is has been over-stated and the project will improve a site that is currently blighted. He feels that the residences, the pool, and the café will add to the area and that the aesthetics are compatible.

Jack Cunningham, longtime resident/owns a 12-unit complex, questioned why so many people are attracted to Sonoma and he attributed it to a successful planning process. Sonoma is a beautiful place with a great quality of life and we are fortunate that so many are attracted to it.

Joseph Aaron, resident/pollster, conducted his own sentiment survey regarding the project. He contends that 68% of respondents to the poll supported the project.

Karin Skooglund, resident, recommended more realistic drawings and story poles. Her primary concerns with the project are with the three-story buildings, the increased traffic, limited parking, sewer, and water. She feels that the architecture needs to be improved. She asked how access to the pool and the provision for valet parking could be guaranteed.

Ed Routhier, resident/applicant, is a member of the North of the Mission Neighborhood Association and said his viewpoint is not the same as those expressed by other members. He

felt the 36 feet height of the buildings on First Street East is in context with the overall neighborhood and helps increase the diversity of housing.

Chair Felder closed the item to public comment.

Comm. Cribb reiterated his view that the area in question is already mixed use and has been historically. In his view, a mixed use development would not be historically out of character for the site. In the previous review, he was concerned about the intensity of the project and the deficiency of parking. The revised proposal goes a long way towards addressing those issues. He recognizes that the hotel is a lightning rod for some, but he noted that the site is already used for relatively intensive commercial purposes. One issue that will require more study is that of the scale and massing of the project, especially with regard to the three-story buildings. That said, he appreciates the articulation introduced in the project architecture and there is a balancing act to be done between height and the desire for additional residential units.

Comm. Wellander is open minded with respect to a hotel component, but he does have concerns associated with it. He is not enthused by the swimming pool, as it takes up a lot of space on the site that could be used to address other site planning issues. He is concerned with the building massing along the frontage of First Street East and visual compatibility with neighboring uses. In his view, consideration should be given to placing any three-story elements in the interior of the site. He noted that the internal site circulation creates some compatibility issues. He supports the recent change to the Second Street East circulation, with the introduction of a loop and he cautioned that grass-crete, as proposed for the fire turnaround, is not usually successful. He asked that future elevations show the context of adjoining development. He appreciates the variety of housing proposed. He places a high priority on preserving Sonoma's sense of community as he evaluates infill development.

Comm. Roberson appreciates the changes made in the revised proposal as it points to a more positive direction that is more compatible with its surroundings. That said, his biggest concerns relate to height and mass along First Street West and the proposed three-story buildings do not appear compatible to him. The major points he wishes to address are the restaurant the pool and hotel. In his view, the concept of a small hotel does not raise such concerns that he would reject it. He appreciates environments that are heterogeneous and contribute to variety and he feels that the neighborhood exhibits this kind of variety. With regard to parking, he wishes to take a conservative approach as parking is a sensitive issue in this neighborhood. In the matter of the pool, he feels that a publically-accessible pool, subject to a covenant, is consistent with the concept of mixed use and would provide neighborhood and community benefits.

Comm. Coleman thanked the public for their input. He supported the reduction in the mass of the hotel as shown in the revised proposal, but the three-story buildings proposed on First Street East are of concern to him. He suggested height reductions on the north and south. He appreciated the change to the circulation on Second Street East. He concurred with Comm. Roberson that a community pool could have benefits to the neighborhood, but it needs to remain accessible to the public. He supports preserving the significant oak trees as proposed. He does not object to the concept of valet parking, but he is concerned about the design of the parking area with respect to neighbor compatibility. He supports the concept of infill but he recognizes that change is difficult at times and would strive to strike a balance for this project to ensure it is compatible with the neighborhood.

Comm. McDonald is a proponent of infill and views it as good urban planning. He supports a variety of housing types to maintain an eclectic mix in Sonoma that is already exemplified in this neighborhood. That said, he recognizes concerns about the size of the hotel and could see it

being scaled back even further. He opposes the parking area adjoining First Street East and would preferred café outdoor seating instead, as an activated street front could be a cornerstone of the development and would contribute to the vitality of the neighborhood in a way that parking does not. With regard to the 3-story buildings on First Street, it is difficult for to visualize this as compatible with the neighborhood. He suggested internal circulation improvements, including a looped connection to First Street East, as the one-way design creates a bottle-neck, as well as compatibility issues on the north. He would like to see additional consideration given to the design of the single-family component, as it feels auto-oriented and is lacking in pedestrian amenities. In addition, the parking layout feels very tight. He agreed with his fellow commissioners that a public pool could be a community asset.

Chair Felder appreciated the comments from the public. He is mainly focused on not losing housing opportunity sites that could provide units for seniors and the work force in Sonoma. He is resistant to the hotel component because it reduces the site area available for housing and would prefer that it would be scaled back even further. He agreed with his fellow commissioners that the 3-story buildings along the First Street East frontage are out of scale with the neighborhood. He is concerned with the proposal to cluster all affordable units in one area of the site and only one unit type.

Chair Felder re-opened the item for public comment.

Jack Wagner, resident, is disappointed there are not enough rentals units provided for Sonoma's workforce. He opposes three story buildings that will block the skyline. He recommended slowing down development overall.

Fred Allebach, non-resident, recommended more affordable housing opportunities.

Laurie Winter, resident, inquired if the building heights could be gradual, placing the lower buildings in front of the higher buildings.

Larry Barnett, resident, suggested the development was intended for transients not necessarily creating a new community for residents.

Lynda Corrado, resident, is concerned with potential impacts to birds that roost in the trees on the site.

Fred Allebach, resident, believed more study is needed for the General Plan, housing elements primarily since the plan takes away from the limited housing stock and opportunity for affordable units. He felt non-profit developers might be more sensitive to "social equity" principles.

Patty Daffurn, resident/former Planning Commissioner, suggested story poles so the community can better visualize the scope of the project.

Jim Bohar, resident/Historic District, viewed the project elements as inconsistent with the neighborhood.

Ed Routhier, Founder/Caymus Capital, said the heritage Oak trees will be preserved, as that was a prime consideration in the site plan.

Chair Felder closed the item for public comment.

Chair Felder thanked those in attendance for their input.

Ed Routhier, resident/Founder/CaymusCapital, thanked the Commission for their comments.

Comments from Commissioners:

None.

Comments from the Audience:

None.

Adjournment

Comm. Roberson made a motion to adjourn. Comm. Cribb seconded. The motion was unanimously adopted.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 10:17 p.m. to the next regular meeting scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 14, 2016

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing minutes were duly and regularly adopted at a regular meeting of the Sonoma Planning Commission on the 12th day of May, 2016.

Approved:

Cristina Morris, Administrative Assistant