

**CITY OF SONOMA
PLANNING COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING OF
Community Meeting Room, 177 First Street West
September 26, 2013
MINUTES**

I hereby declare under penalty of perjury that the agenda for this meeting was posted on Friday, September 20, 2013, on the bulletin board outside the front of Sonoma City Hall, No. 1 the Plaza, Sonoma, California. Chair Roberson called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. in the Community Meeting Room, 177 First Street West.

Roll Call:

Present: Chair Roberson, Comms. Edwards, Felder, Willers, Tippell, Howarth, Henevald, Cribbs (Alternate),
Absent:
Others Present: Planning Director Goodison, Senior Planner Gjestland, Administrative Assistant Morris

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

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC: None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: None

CORRESPONDENCE: Late mail regarding Item # 1 from Mary Jane Stolte and Maia Craig

Item #1 – Public Hearing – Review of Nicora Place, an 18-unit planned development proposed at 821-845 West Spain Street, including consideration of environmental review, a Planned Development Permit, Tentative Map, and Use Permit.

Applicant/Property Owner: Ledson & Ledson Development/Steve Ledson

Senior Planner Gjestland presented staff's report.

Comm. Felder confirmed with staff that 34 on-site parking spaces are required by Code and that a total of 68 on-site spaces are proposed including garage spaces, driveway apron spaces, and dedicated guest parking spaces.

Chair Roberson opened the public hearing

Project Architect Doug Hilberman (Axia Architects) gave a presentation to the Commission. He noted that Steve Ledson wanted to focus on providing quality 3-bedroom, 2-bath homes for his workforce and that this is missing in the downtown. He feels that 2-story units are compatible with the surrounding context considering 2-story buildings adjoin to the south and west. They

met with neighbors three times and in response to neighbor concerns have increased setbacks on the south, west and from West Spain St., added the partial two-story E1 plan, and reduced the density, noting that the original concept was 21 units prior to the Planning Commission study session in July 2012. Losing a unit also opened up the corners of the site. The park area was reduced, but the rear yards have increased and the park still provides visual open space for half the units. The traffic impact study concludes no significant traffic safety issues at driveways or with Junipero Serra Dr. The price point for workforce housing and the minimum density required in the R-M zoning is not consistent with the neighbor's desire for a 6-unit project. He emphasized they intentionally chose 3-bedroom, 2-bath homes based on the lack of this housing type in the R-M zone. He noted that CC&R's would require use of garages for vehicle parking, allowing guests to park within driveway aprons and that 10 of the units would have convenient access to the four dedicated guest spaces.

Bida Lewis, 19328 Junipero Serra Dr., thanked Mr. Ledson for meeting with neighbors but expressed concerns about turning left from Junipero Serra Dr. onto West Spain St., and the difficulty for pedestrians crossing West Spain St. She asked the Commission to enforce the limits of the Development Code and consider traffic impacts.

Comm. Tippell confirmed that the nearest marked crosswalk on West Spain St. is at the intersection with Sonoma Highway.

Georgette Darcy, owner of a 1-story condominium unit directly to the west, at 847 West Spain St. #1, emphasized that the proposed development, with a row of 2-story buildings close to Sonoma Gardens, will be profoundly different than current site conditions and negatively impacts her quality of life, privacy, and sunlight. She feels the proposal should be scaled back and recommended that the Commission adhere to the standard R-M zoning regulations and not grant a Planned Development Permit. She questioned the applicant on whether his workers can afford the \$500,000 homes planned for the site.

Kathleen Laudin, 847 West Spain St. #2, concurred with the previously stated concerns. In addition, she feels sight lines for vehicles exiting Sonoma Garden's driveway will worsen and noted the old vineyard and many trees will be lost with replacement trees taking 2-3 decades to mature. She is thankful for the project modifications but feels that the density should be further reduced.

Jeff Buscher, 820 Palou St., expressed concern regarding the proposed density and asked that the Commission consider the proposal in the larger neighborhood context. He feels that too many compromises have been allowed for other developments in the area and that this project will further erode the neighborhood.

Jim Rutkowski, 847 West Spain St. #3, feels that the applicant is using the Planned Development Permit process to maximize development and profit by building only detached 3-bedroom, 2-bath homes under the pretext of workforce housing. He noted that only four units would be contract affordable units. He appreciates the new E1 plan but feels the project will create a wall of two story-units on the west side of the site that will adversely impact neighbor's sunlight, privacy, property values and desirability of their properties. He does not feel that the findings or objectives for a Planned Development Permit are met in terms of compatibility and preserving significant trees on site and that neighbors are being injured. He requested 1-story buildings and other unit types not just directed at families, expressing the view that only 3-bedroom, 2-bath homes are proposed because they command the highest price and are easiest to sell. He takes issue with the many variations/exemptions being requested, stating that the neighbors will suffer as a result.

Karen Buscher, 820 Palou St., was critical of other projects built in the area. In her experience obstructed sight lines make it difficult to turn left onto West Spain St. from Junipero Serra Dr. She questions the conclusions of the Traffic Impact Study, particularly in regard to conflicting left turn movements onto West Spain St. from Junipero Serra Dr. and the east project driveway. She is also concerned about pedestrian safety given the lack of a crosswalk on West Spain St. in the vicinity.

Jessica Schorr, 905 West Spain St. #M, summarized her counts of the number of residential units, parking spaces, and businesses along the West Spain St. corridor between Sonoma Hwy and Fifth St. West. She noted the various traffic generators within this stretch of West Spain St., and concluded that the proposal will increase traffic, noise, and privacy issues while decreasing livability for residents in the area.

Chair Roberson confirmed with staff that only residents of the seven single-family homes within Sonoma Village West (aka Orchard Park) located on the east side of the gate have access through the gate and that this limitation could not change without reconsideration by the Planning Commission.

Lori Winter, 19333 Junipero Serra Dr., concurs with all neighbor comments and asks that the Commission consider the larger area where there has been a loss of open space due to development over the years. She feels the proposal is comparable to the applicant's West MacArthur St. project but that neighborhood conditions are totally different. She expressed concern about adding two new driveways on West Spain St. in proximity to many other existing driveways and asked the Commission to consider making the private street one-way and widening it to allow for parking. She has concerns about enforcement of the CC&R's and potential on-street parking impacts. She feels the many variations from normal zoning standards being requested through the Planned Development permit impose problems on neighbors due to the vision of the project focused on 18 detached 3-bedroom, 2-bath homes. She noted a neighborhood petition in opposition and concluded that the project is too much in a small space.

Mike Burns, 847 West Spain St. #7, is most concerned about the 2-story homes along the west project boundary adjacent to Sonoma Gardens. He asked how tall the replacement trees would be when planted.

Steve Ledson, applicant and owner of subject property, indicated he was available to answer questions and thanked the neighbors, Planning Commission and staff for their input on the project. He emphasized there is ample parking overall in the development and there would be recorded CC&R's that residents would have to abide by ensuring that garages are used for vehicle parking. This will allow guests to park in driveway apron spaces and addresses concerns about on-street parking impacts. He indicated that the detached 3-bedroom/2-bath unit type creates more housing opportunities and is intended to address current market demands and the family/workforce demographic. One-story units cannot be incorporated without reducing the total number of units, and he cannot lose any more units while keeping the project feasible. He noted there are many neighboring two-story buildings/units that look down into the site with lesser setbacks than what is being proposed. He feels the project looks more open than surrounding development and the density has been reduced from his initial concept of 21 units. Tree removal is based on recommendations of the arborist report and most perimeter trees will remain in conjunction with planting replacement trees. He disagrees that the project will reduce surrounding property values.

Chair Roberson confirmed with Mr. Ledson that a 60"-box tree would have a height of ±20 feet and canopy diameter of ±12 feet although this can vary by species and age.

Comm. Henevald asked the applicant why units within his West MacArthur St. Planned Development have not been built. The applicant responded that the building permits are ready to be picked up but he has been busy rehabilitating the former Coghill property as well as with his wine business.

Chair Roberson confirmed with the applicant that a Homeowners Association (HOA) would be in place to enforce the CC&R's after all units within the development are sold.

Comm. Howarth asked the applicant why a greater mixture of unit types was not proposed, noting the lack of 1-story units and that the 2-story units are all proposed with plate on plate construction and 3 bedrooms and 2 baths. The applicant responded that the project does not pencil out if 1-story homes are included due to the loss in square footage and that the 3-bedroom/2-bath configuration can accommodate more household types thus presenting greater opportunities.

Chair Roberson closed the public hearing.

Comm. Howarth asked staff if a crosswalk on West Spain Street in vicinity of the site was considered. Planning Director Goodison noted that this issue is not specific to any individual project and the traffic study does not provide the City with a basis for passing the cost (or share of) a crosswalk improvement onto the applicant. The standard process would be for concerned neighbors to fill out a Traffic Safety Hazard Reporting Form for consideration by the Traffic Safety Committee. This would result in quicker consideration than tying the concept to the project.

Comm. Howarth clarified with Planning Director Goodison that the Planned Development Permit allows the applicant greater flexibility from normal standards but also gives the Planning Commission additional latitude to require tradeoffs for that flexibility.

Comm. Edwards referenced the massing diagram presented by the project architect, highlighting the existing density and infill development around the project site. He views the project as an oasis within this setting and noted that some conditions of surrounding development are not that desirable. He agrees with the applicant that the detached unit type adds variety to the neighborhood and is appropriate for the site. Traffic on West Spain St. includes regional traffic and most traffic is at peak commute hours. He expressed the view that an attached development, such as is found on adjoining properties, would have greater impacts and he supports this family-oriented neighborhood proposal.

Comm. Tippell concurred with Comm. Edwards and noted that if adjoining housing developments were reviewed today they would look much different as infill development is now subject to more scrutiny. He indicated that site access as proposed with two driveways is acceptable and that in order to get 1-story units on the west side of the site 4 to 6 units would have to be eliminated and the minimum allowable density for the site is 14 units under its R-M zoning. He is sensitive to neighbor concerns but also recognizes property owner rights. In terms of traffic safety he would like a crosswalk installed on West Spain St. and would prefer that the intersection of West Spain St./Fifth St. West not be signalized with respect to the different improvement options.

Comm. Willers noted that he lives in a PUD similar to the proposed project in terms of the private street width, 2-story units, and setbacks. In his opinion, the applicant's West MacArthur St. site is very similar to the West Spain St. site in that Highway 12/Broadway is located in proximity to the east, Second Street West is a corridor, and there is school traffic in the area. He agrees with Comm. Edwards' comment about the proposal being an "oasis." He views the proposal as an alternative to an attached multi-family development, which would likely have greater impacts on neighbors with more massive multi-unit buildings and congregate parking areas at the edges of the site. He feels that parking is sufficient as proposed, the project conforms to the General Plan, and the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration is adequate. He has no difficulty with development but agrees with Comm. Howarth's comment that the proposed plate on plate unit design contributes to a more massive feel.

Comm. Felder concurred with Comm. Willers. Although he had some initial reservations, he is satisfied given the concessions and modifications that have been made. He feels the project fits well in its layout and appreciates the provision of detached single-family homes as an infill project. He would like more variety in the homes, including some one-story, but understands that it increases costs. He suggested the applicant consider redesigning some of the second floor elements and including one-story affordable units.

Comm. Edwards stressed the importance of having the affordable units look like and be similar to the other units.

Comm. Henevald concurred with Comm. Howarth's comment regarding the plate on plate construction and suggested including one-story homes or units with second floor dormers on Lots 5 and 8. He also feels that a crosswalk on West Spain St. is important.

Comm. Howarth summarized that the commission has two issues to consider: whether building modifications should be required prior to approval, and whether some of the required affordable units should be for low-income households versus moderate.

Chair Roberson directed the commission to address the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration prior to taking action on the project.

Motion: Comm. Tippell made a motion to adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration as presented. Comm. Willers seconded. The motion was unanimously approved, 7-0.

Chair Roberson noted the consensus of the Commission appeared to be in favor of approving the project entitlements but asked if further modifications were desired.

Comm. Tippell opposed requiring inclusionary affordable units at the low-income level but was open to some modifications on Lots 5 and 8 as suggested by Comm. Henevald.

City Planner Goodison noted that modifying units on Lots 5 and 8 may not address compatibility concerns since this issue is focused primarily on the west project boundary.

A discussion ensued on whether modifications to the second floor element of units on Lots 5 and 8 or the west project boundary should be required. As part of this discussion Comm. Willers noted that introducing two E1 units on Lots 2 and 4 substantially improved the relationship with Sonoma Gardens to the west. He also pointed out that the unit on Lot 1 does not present a gable end to the west and the unit on Lot 3 has a narrow profile so is satisfied with the west edge. Ultimately, the majority of the Commission was satisfied with the project as proposed,

especially in light of increased costs that would result from additional modifications or requirements.

Comm. Howarth made a motion to approve the Planned Development Permit, Use Permit, and Tentative Map for the project as submitted, subject to the conditions of approval prepared by staff.

Comm. Edwards seconded. The motion was approved 6-1, Comm. Henevald dissenting.

Issues Update:

1. Commissioners are encouraged to visit the Valley Oaks Homes project.
2. The Mission Square project will be heard at the November 14th Planning Commission meeting.
3. Comm. Henevald notes that water levels are improving at Lake Mendocino.

Comments from the Audience: No public comments.

Comm. Edwards made a motion to adjourn. Comm. Henevald seconded. The motion was unanimously approved, 7-0.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m. to the next regular meeting scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 10, 2013.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing minutes were duly and regularly adopted at a regular meeting of the Planning Commission on the 14th day of November, 2013.

Approved:

Cristina Morris, Administrative Assistant