



PLANNING COMMISSION EXCERPT MINUTES

Regular Meeting
October 7, 2013 at 7:00 p.m.
City Council Chambers
701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, CA 94025

CALL TO ORDER – 7:03 p.m.

ROLL CALL – Bressler (arrived 7:05 p.m.), Eiref (Vice Chair - absent), Ferrick, Kadwany (Chair), Onken, Riggs, Strehl

INTRODUCTION OF STAFF – Deanna Chow, Senior Planner; Rachel Grossman, Associate Planner; Arlinda Heineck, Community Development Director; Kyle Perata, Assistant Planner; Leigh Prince, City Attorney; Thomas Rogers, Senior Planner

E. STUDY SESSION ITEM

E1. Study Session for Compliance Review/St. Anton Partners/3605-3639 Haven Avenue: Study session to review the architectural design of a 393 unit, multi-family residential development relative to the design standards and design guidelines of the R-4-S (AHO) (High Density Residential, Special – Affordable Housing Overlay) zoning district. The Planning Commission's review is advisory only and will be taken into consideration as part of the Community Development Director's determination of whether the proposal is in compliance with the R-4-S development regulations and design standards. The proposal includes application of State Density Bonus Law, which provides a density bonus for providing on-site affordable units and allows modifications to development standards and/or architectural requirements.

Staff Comment: Planner Chow said this was an opportunity for the Commission and public to provide feedback on the proposed project's compliance with the District R-4-S guidelines. She said the Planning Commission's review was advisory only and would be taken into consideration as part of the Community Development Director's determination of whether the proposal was in compliance with the R-4-S development regulations and design standards. She said the determination of the Community Development Director was final and not subject to appeal. She noted a colors and materials board had been distributed for the Commission's review. She restated the proposed outline shown on page 12 of the staff report for conducting the meeting:

- Project Presentation by Applicant
- Commission Questions on Project Proposal
- Public Comment on Project Proposal

- Commission Comments on Project Proposal

Public Comment: Mr. Ardie Zahedani, St. Anton Partners, introduced Ms. Rachael Green, project manager, Mr. Ben Seeger and Mr. Keith Labus, KTG Architects, David Johnson, community advocate, and Mr. Steve Eggert and Mr. Peter Geremia, co-founders of St. Anton Partners. He said the firm develops, builds, and manages 6,500 apartment buildings all of which were located in California. He said the housing being proposed was in close proximity to Facebook, a major employer, and Menlo Gateway, a future potential major employer and noted the community context map. He said this was a 393-unit complex that was well parked and well circulated and provided a number of options for open space and amenities. He noted the wrap parking and also private garages and carports. He said there were 363 parking spaces in the wrap, and that the Town Center and area known as the “Backyard” had many amenities.

Ms. Green said onsite amenities would include a coffee café, sports lounge, full club room with chef kitchen, convenience store, and bicycle shop. She said the project would have all of the core amenities in one location with intent of creating a sense of community and reducing traffic trips. She said the project design was contemporary transitional and had clean lines, modern forms, and warm wood tones. She said it would be consistent with sustainable multi-family green point rated development and exceed Title 24 standards. She said they would use green labeled paints and stains, carpets and flooring, and LED energy efficient lighting and recycled building materials. She showed the site plan of three buildings located around the open spaces. She said the “Backyard” concept included the swimming pool, spa, bocce ball court, dog park, outdoor dining facilities and roof deck, all of which were available for tenants to use for private parties. She noted that the Town Center would offer a location for a shuttle pickup and dropoff. She said the units were studio, one, two and three bedrooms with designer interiors.

Commissioner Ferrick asked about the textured stucco on the materials board. She said it was damaged and wondered how well it would weather on the buildings. Ms. Green said the materials were wrapped together and probably rubbed against each other. She said the full stucco would be durable.

Chair Kadvany said the staff report discussed the placement of some units in center building and amenities center. Ms. Green said there were three units located on the fourth floor on top of the amenities portion of Building A that exceed the density bonus equivalent calculation or alternative onsite height. She said they needed another four feet of height for those units. She said also it was a flood zone area and the buildings would be raised above the flood plane.

Mr. Keith Labus, KTG Group, said the units had been located in the center so they would not impact surrounding sites. He said they looked at relocating the three units without impacting the project adversely but were not able to accomplish that. Replying

to a question from Chair Kadvany, Mr. Labus said one of the units was a one-bedroom and two units were two-bedrooms.

Chair Kadvany asked about parking ratios. Mr. Zahedani said the firm's experience in managing nearly 6,500 apartment buildings has shown them that being slightly over-parked was a benefit for the community and surrounding areas. Chair Kadvany said he asked as he thought there was a possibility of freeing up area for more open space.

Commissioner Strehl asked if the shuttle service would be provided by employers or the complex. Mr. Zahedani said the infrastructure would be in place and it was master planned for others to provide shuttle service. Commissioner Strehl asked about transit through the complex. Mr. Zahedani said there was a nearby transit stop on Haven Avenue outside of the project area. Commissioner Strehl said each unit had its own washer and dryer and asked about water reclamation. Mr. Zahedani said they have energy efficient appliances and were applying green standards. He said he did not have water usage numbers at this time. Commissioner Strehl asked if they had a market analysis of who the tenants would be. Mr. Zahedani said they had done three marketing analyses which had indicated there was a major job/housing imbalance in the area. Commissioner Strehl asked about rental amounts. Mr. Zahedani said there would be 53 units rent restricted to low income and the other units would be market rate.

Commissioner Ferrick asked if there were rain collector or gray water collector systems planned. Mr. Zahedani said there were none. Commissioner Ferrick asked about flooding in winter. Mr. Zahedani said they were raising the platform two to three feet to prevent impacts.

Commissioner Riggs suggested they might want to look at collecting and treating the washing machine discharge water for landscaping use. He asked if parking was included in the unit lease or if it was unbundled. Ms. Green said in Building A parking was bundled with the unit. She said elsewhere on the site there was an opportunity to rent additional garage or included in the rent was parking available in open carport spaces.

Commissioner Bressler asked how the design guidelines informed this project. Mr. Zahedani said that the modulation guidelines forced them to accomplish many more undulations on the elevations.

Mr. Steven Bitler, Menlo Park resident, said he was also representing Lantec Corporation, located adjacent to this site. He noted the business had been located there 25 years. He asked if there was some estimate of the timing of the occupancy and if that was part of the record.

Chair Kadvany said he thought the target was two years. Planner Chow indicated the target completion date was 2016.

Mr. Bitler said every year the streets in the area flood noting a bridge and draining area and asked how that would be mitigated for the project. He said small companies in the area can send employees home early if there was flooding. He said with flooding there reached a point when it was no longer possible to drive a car through the water. He said there consideration for mitigation was odor from the landfill at the end of Marsh Road, which he said dependent upon the wind might travel in any direction. He asked what the responsibility of the City would be for these issues and their mitigation for these new residents of Menlo Park. He said he did not think flooding and odor impact had been considered fully as part of this project development.

Chair Kadvany closed the public comment period.

Commission Comment: Chair Kadvany asked if staff had any information related to the speaker's questions. Planner Chow said part of the larger Housing Element environmental assessment flooding would have been reviewed under hydrology and water quality. She said the City was looking at doing something with the City of Redwood City on the Atherton Channel to address flooding along Haven Avenue. She said in her and City Attorney Prince's recollection the issue of odors from the landfill had not been raised as part of the larger Housing Element environmental assessment.

Commissioner Bressler said that the Commission was only advisory on this project and this was being forced upon the City by the State as part of the Housing Element. He said the question was what the City's liability would be and whether it would be greater because of the existing flooding and odor problems.

Ms. Prince, City Attorney, said she did not think the City had additional liability related to the speaker's comments. She said the environmental impacts and mitigations associated with rezoning this site to the R-4-S (AHO) were considered, and now the applicant was bringing a project that fit within that zoning.

Chair Kadvany said with people living there that the responsibility might devolve to the City.

Commissioner Riggs said he did not think odor would be a problem based on the usual wind patterns in the area. He said flooding was an issue but it was an opportunity for a solution to develop between the Cities of Redwood City and Menlo Park. He said 393 parking spaces and associated traffic would have impacts on local traffic. He said he had concern with Marsh Road as one of the primary entrances to Menlo Park, and he suggested finding out from the City Council if the traffic impacts on Marsh Road were prioritized for resolution.

Commissioner Onken said students had presented plans to the Commission that connected this area to the rest of Menlo Park, which was not what this proposed

development would do. He said this proposal identified east-west connections but no north-south connections. He asked about traffic studies.

Planner Chow said there had been a traffic analysis as part of the environmental assessment and there were some traffic impacts identified as significant and unavoidable because much of the right of way was Caltrans owned. She said some identified impacts would be mitigated through Facebook or the Bohannon project if and when it moved forward. She said related to the St. Anton project proposal and other projects along Haven Avenue that there will be significant pedestrian and bicycle improvements made from Bayfront Park extending along Haven Avenue. She said they would like to include some of the north south connectivity in future planning for the area.

Commissioner Onken said there had been comments that this was a large and monotonous design which the architect had responded to with additional modulation. He thought perhaps it might be worth considering making the amenity building different from the rest of the proposal or making additional modulations. He said the materials indicated it was one coat stucco, which was a very quickly applied, commercially favorable product. He said his concern was with how it would look in 10 to 15 years.

Ms. Green said their company repainted their apartment buildings every 10 to 15 years and were very pleased with the aesthetics of the project. Prompted by Commissioner Onken, Ms. Green said they were using vinyl coated windows.

Chair Kadvany said they were looking at getting true simulated divided light windows constructed. Ms. Green said they were looking at the Milgard Monarch product that was being manufactured for them. Commissioner Onken said there were no mullions. Ms. Green said the look of mullions was created by the framing of the windows.

Commissioner Ferrick said she liked the entry area and Town Square area, the variety of amenities, and common space area. She said the buildings were handsome and she appreciated the wood trim that warmed the stucco. She urged them to consider good water use and flood protection, water use and reuse.

Commissioner Strehl asked about traffic as the site was isolated and there were no grocery stores in the area. Ms. Green said there was a convenience store that was not for regular grocery shopping. Planner Chow said the amenities were intended for residents only and not for members of the public to travel to the site.

Chair Kadvany said he liked the wood trim accents and the window design. He suggested that there might be ways to individuate space, areas, and planes.

Commissioner Riggs asked what they do when the plastic wood trim hazes. Ms. Green said it was not plastic but a recycled material called Resista that had been used in Asia for about 30 years. She said they were able to look at the material in a harbor building in Hong Kong where it had been for about 20 years and which still had its original color.

Commissioner Riggs said the ratio of benefits did not support the additional height requested and asked if there was the potential of a waiver. Planner Chow said the applicant was asking for a waiver. She said the maximum allowable height was 40 feet, the bonus density height was 54-feet one-inch and the applicant was requesting for the three units on top of the main amenities building a height of 57-feet nine-inches. She said to grant a waiver it needed to be determined that without the additional height the development would be precluded. She said they were looking at additional information from the applicant and guidance from the Commission.

Mr. Zahedani said the site was 9.69 acres, which allowed for 40 units per acre based on density bonus and underlying zoning. He said they worked to spread the project over the entire area and the question was where they could put the last three units and have the least impact on either the neighbors or freeway. He said putting the units in the center achieved that. He said they looked at moving them to front on Haven Avenue or to remove some open space. He said there was also a 40-foot easement that bisected the project. He said they found no feasible way of moving those three units without detrimentally impacting the project. Commissioner Riggs asked if the removal of one of the two story amenities would make the project infeasible. Mr. Zahedani said that went back to the scope of the project and the need to have amenities on the site to create a neighborhood. He said in that area there was no sense of space and slicing those amenities would impact the character of the project.

Commissioner Ferrick said in serving on the Housing Element Steering Committee that they had observed the benefits of the site including bay views and proximities to big employers as well as the negatives as it was isolated, which was why traffic was a major concern. She said having the amenities onsite would go a long way toward making this a viable community and attract other things like a grocery store on another site. She said she did not know if the three units were needed for the project to be fiscally feasible but where they were planned would have the least impact. She said being concerned about the flood plane that having the site raised did not bother her. She said also this project would have a good impact on schools as Redwood City welcomed it. She said the bicycle and pedestrian improvements were intended to address traffic concerns.

Commissioner Onken said this was a very supportable project. He said regarding the three units on top of the amenities building that the project needed the greater height to be more dominant than the high voltage transmission line pylon.

Commissioner Ferrick said secured bike parking was provided outside but noted it was wise that each unit has a deck with enough space to keep a bicycle stored.

Commissioner Riggs said he would also support greater individuation of the central amenities buildings, and was glad the project would be built.

Chair Kadvany said there was the potential for different landscaping around the site to help with individuation of the site and forms.

In summary, the development was generally well received by the Planning Commission, highlighting the overall design, including the site layout with the town square, modulation of the buildings, and the use of varied common open spaces and the provision of on-site amenities. Members of the Commission also provided feedback for consideration, noting the desire for more distinction between buildings and spaces, particularly the amenities and common spaces, the potential for conversion of some of the additional parking spaces into common open space, and the creation of more visual cues with the use of differentiated landscaping. The Commission also commented on St. Anton's request for a waiver for additional height for three units situated on the top of the main amenities building. The Commission generally felt that the additional height would have the least physical impact to other components of the project and from an architectural sense, the height would help avoid monotony and distinguish the amenities building. The Planning Commission's review was advisory only and will be taken into consideration as part of the Community Development Director's determination on whether the proposal is in compliance with the R-4-S development regulations and design standards.

Chair Kadvany recessed the meeting for a short break.

Chair Kadvany reopened the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 11:28 p.m.

Staff Liaison: Thomas Rogers, Senior Planner

Recording Secretary: Brenda Bennett

Approved by the Planning Commission on November 4, 2013