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Planning Commission vote on Terraces pushed back again

By Pippa Fisher

The continuation of a very long May 18 Lafayette Planning Commission meeting to decide the fate of the 315-unit Terraces project has once again been pushed back.

The meeting that had been scheduled for June 15 was postponed to June 29, the city announced in a statement issued on June 10. The statement said that staff and the city's consultants are working diligently to prepare information requested by commissioners regarding traffic impact analysis and potential impacts on emergency evacuations, and needed more time to complete that task. The staff report and additional information will be made available June 22. Unlike at the previous meeting, the planning commission will be allowing live public comment during the June 29 meeting.

The highly controversial project proposed for Deer Hill Road has been in the works in one form or another since 2011.

Attorney for the developer Bryan Wenter warned the city in a letter dated June 13 that under the housing accountability act and permit streamlining act, the city is in danger of running out of time to make a decision within the 90-day period.

However city officials say that in the case of a land use decision relying on an addendum to the original environmental impact report, it is not clear that the same time constraints apply. Nonetheless they say the city intends to move forward with reasonable expediency.

Save Lafayette Founder Michael Griffiths says that staff would not need these postponements if they had done a subsequent EIR in the first place. "An addendum EIR is insufficient and inappropriate, given the long time since the last EIR, all the environmental changes that have taken place and the new information that has come to light," says Griffiths.

Griffiths says the project proposal has changed little since the original EIR, while environmental circumstances - traffic, air pollution, wildfire - have worsened significantly. "Consequently, a denial of the project would be the most appropriate course of action by the city council," says Griffiths.

In his letter to the city, Wenter says, "Rather than continuing to placate Save Lafayette and other project opponents who will raise any issue they can imagine regardless of how implausible under California land use law, the city ought to be prepared to take all actions necessary to schedule any remaining SB 330 hearings expeditiously."

Following the June 29 planning commission meeting, it is expected that there will be an appeal brought before the city council whichever way the decision goes. The council will then hear the matter de novo and must make its decision within two meetings.

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