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Golden Gate Way apartment project gets the go-ahead

By Pippa Fisher



The current buildings on Golden Gate Way will be demolished to make way for the 71-unit complex. Photo Pippa Fisher

waivers per state density bonus law. It will replace the current two-story, 47-unit retail/residential building.

This was the second hearing for the city council of the five total meetings for the project that's been in the works for two years. The council, following its Jan. 22 meeting, had asked the applicant to return to this final meeting with various modifications, which, explained Madison Park Director of Development Claire Han, had mostly been addressed with added solar water heating, increased bicycle parking, nine EV-ready spaces (as opposed to merely EV-capable), trash receptacles, and plaza seating to make the proposed parklet area more generational-friendly.

However most of the time was taken up addressing issues of privacy for neighbors to the south who will be most impacted by the four-story building overlooking their homes and yards, and also addressing the issue of having the project be compatible with plans as they develop for a creekside path.

For increased privacy, Han explained that they have reduced the size of the fourth floor windows on the south side of the building, will provide top down/bottom up shades to all bedroom windows on the third and fourth floors, and are adding horizontal exterior cladding to balconies on the southeastern building facade.

Although previous direction from the council suggested exploring the addition of trees and fencing on the neighbor's side of the creek for screening, Han explained that in a meeting with the Flood Control District they learned that such planting within the easement would not be permitted.

Residents to the south whose homes will be overlooked asked for the removal of balconies on the third and fourth floors and suggested that from such a tall building new residents will be staring directly into their yards and bedrooms. They urged the developer to plant trees, with one resident saying it was an "unbelievable invasion of privacy."

Longtime Lafayette resident Libby Henry said that the tall four-story building would set a precedent in the city and echoed others in pointing out the lack of balance in the project, particularly with the loss of current small businesses.

Council Member Gina Dawson suggested thinking outside the box and wondered if perhaps the developer would consider offering a payment for those neighbors directly affected so they could plant their own trees.

The developer's attorney David Blackwell pointed out there was no legal requirement for them to do such planting on adjacent properties prompting Council Member Carl Anduri to respond, "You have to realize you are coming into the neighborhood and completely changing the neighborhood, so I understand the legal argument . but you've got to understand the way the neighbors feel about this," noting that residents south of the property never imagined such a tall building would be built overlooking their properties.

Following suggestions from city staff that the developer might consider an in lieu payment for planting new trees to the seven homes impacted for a total cost of \$7,500, the developer agreed.

The council also heard from Creeks Committee Member Jeff Gilman who reiterated the committee's goal to

The city council has approved a new four-story, 71-unit, residential development in downtown Lafayette - construction that some say is out of balance for the area and which neighbors describe as an invasion of their privacy.

The Feb. 22 meeting was the fifth hearing, and therefore the last allowable under state law, on the Madison Park Apartments proposed for 3483 Golden Gate Way, just south of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center at First Street and located alongside the creek. In what has become commonplace in Lafayette these days, the meeting went until 2 a.m. the next day as council members worked hard to finalize details and conditions of approval in what they noted was an important and highly visible part of the downtown area.

The 53-foot 6-inch building will provide 65 apartments and six townhomes, including 10 units at below-market-rate, qualifying the project to receive concessions and

construct a creekside trail and strongly suggested the construction of the project's retaining wall along the southern property line should be coordinated with the city to allow for this, something the developer had so far expressed reluctance to do since detailed creek trail plans are as yet unknown.

Again, with some suggestion on wording from city staff, it was eventually agreed that the developer would work collaboratively with the city's engineering department on the construction of the project's retaining wall to a design standard sufficient to accommodate the creekside trail. Should costs exceed \$100,000, the city would reimburse the rest of the cost to the developer if they chose to go ahead.

And so the project was approved unanimously (minus Council Member Cam Burks who was absent), subject to modified conditions of approval.

Anduri summed up the long night's work. "There's been a lot of give and take and we appreciate that, and now we're at the stage where we've approved the project. We all have the same interests - that is the best possible project for the city of Lafayette."

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