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Zoning Decision on Controversial Development Possibly Coming This Spring

By *Cathy Tyson*

The proposed multi-family apartment project on the acreage known as the Christmas Tree lot will have to wait for a City decision on zoning of the parcel. The 315-unit Terraces of Lafayette was proposed in March of last year for the twenty-two acre site at the corner of Pleasant Hill Road and Deer Hill Road.

Vocal opponents had attended many prior City Council meetings, arguing that the already busy intersection near Acalanes High School would be negatively impacted by the additional traffic "Terraces" residents would create.

Others complained the site is not appropriate for dense development.

The Lafayette City Council decided at a September 2011 meeting to pause to allow staff time to prepare a response to material submitted by the applicant - developer O'Brien Land Company. "Our analysis and responses should be completed in the next 30-60 days," said Senior Planner Christine Sinnette.

Meanwhile the project is going through environmental review. Ann Merideth, Special Projects Manager, expects the Draft Environmental Impact Report to be out in late February or early March.

"We have been gratified by the level of excitement about the project, and the expressions of locals who are interested in having an opportunity to stay in Lafayette in an all-new rental community, built to a new green construction standard," said Terraces Project Manager Dave Baker. "We, too, are excited at the prospect, and are launching a new website in the next two weeks to show our floorplans, features and some new renderings: www.terracesoflafayette.com."

Possible rezoning would encompass the Christmas Tree lot, but also four additional properties on Deer Hill Road to a rural residential classification. Only the Christmas Tree lot, and a tiny sliver of land abutting Highway 24, owned by CalTrans, are currently zoned Administrative/Professional/Office/Multifamily, that would allow up to 35 dwelling units per acre.

The City proposed zoning change would bring the allowable density down to one dwelling unit per acre. These zoning changes have been discussed for years, but never officially adopted. At issue is the land use application by developer O'Brien for the apartment complex that was received by the City before any official zoning change was made. Look for the matter to be addressed in the coming months.

Reach the reporter at: cathy@lamorindaweekly.com

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