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Lucas Ranch Development Appealed

By Cathy Tyson

There was yet another bump in the road for the beleaguered Lucas Ranch Estates development in Burton Valley. Although the Planning Commission approved the project's Phase I Hillside Development Permit for Lot 4 on a split vote Jan. 4, adjacent homeowner Bryan Goldwyn and Mayor Mark Mitchell filed an appeal of that decision.

At issue is the proximity, privacy and mainly the appearance of what is supposed to be a very low, one-story home. While the conceptual drawings meet the letter of the law of what the city considers to be a one-story home, it actually appears to be a two-story home, when viewed from below.

On Jan. 4 the Planning Commission reviewed lots 4, 6 and 7, along with the privacy study they had directed the applicant to prepare, which included photos taken from the private section of Rohrer Drive, along with photo renderings. They ultimately adopted on a split vote, four in favor and three against, the Phase I application by Lucas Ranch developer Soldier Field Partners, and required as a condition of approval, to make the home on lot 4 appear as a very low one-story residence when viewed from any vantage point.

Goldwyn appealed the Planning Commission's decision Jan. 14 because of a number of factors, including: the development is not compatible with the scale of the existing neighborhood, there is no entitlement to build homes of the proposed size and the home is not very low or single-story, with similar concerns for lots 6 and 7, except for the one-story requirement.

In addition, Mayor Mitchell also filed an appeal of the Planning Commission determination for lots 4 and 6. One of his concerns was the lack of story poles for a proposed stable that was slated for lot 4.

At the Feb. 22 City Council meeting, architect Tim Ward proposed a modified slightly smaller version of the house that is pushed back away from the Goldwyn property and reconfigures the conceptual plans, so the home appears less massive. While still large, drawings from this home have shrunk - from over 10,000 gross square feet to 8,600 gross square feet - from October to November 2015.

After much discussion and public comment, the matter was continued until April 25 to give the applicant the opportunity to modify the lot 4 proposed home to appear as a very low one-story residence. According to the city attorney, Mayor Mitchell's appeal has been satisfied since the council is reviewing the matter.

Sending it back to a divided Planning Commission might be causing more harm than good, suggested Council Member Mike Anderson. Now the burden is on the applicant and architect to resolve height concerns and come up with a low slung home; they are also required to include a conceptual landscape plan that would help screen the home from the Goldwyn's residence.

A loose-knit group of "over the bridge neighbors," also known as "Rohrer extension" residents, who live in close proximity to Goldwyn are contributing to the effort, according to David George. He sees this decision as an "encouraging step" that "shows the city is listening, common sense prevailed." But he adds, "This could have been handled by the Planning Commission."

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