

Arden Wood neighbors, developer listen, learn

Heated discussion sheds new light on controversial high-rise tower condo plan at Town Hall Meeting

by Eric Castongia

With a standing room only crowd of over 300 people in attendance, a Town Hall Meeting was held on Nov. 1 at St. Cecilia's Lower Church Hall to educate neighborhood residents about a proposed 4.6 acre development on the Arden Wood Christian Science property.

The meeting was sponsored by the Neighbors of Arden Wood (NOA), a group of neighbors in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development, and the West of Twin Peaks Central Council (WTPCC).

Invited to address neighborhood questions and concerns were District 7 Supervisor Sean Elsbernd, District 4 Carmen Chu and former Planning Department Zoning Administrator Robert Passmore. Also in attendance was the current developer, Robert Mendelsohn, president of Republic Urban Properties, West Coast Division, and his team, to present their vision of the proposed development.

Two presentations were made to the neighbors prior to a question-and-answer period. The first presentation was given by NOA, which focused on neighborhood concerns including parking and traffic problems, access to the site, loss of green space and the expectation of a negative change to the neighbors quality of life.

Mendelsohn then presented the developer's current plans, which includes two high-rise towers of 13 and six stories, as well as town homes. The developer stated that the City's inclusionary housing requirement for low and moderate income households will be provided on site.

In order to build the proposed towers, the developer plans to file for a Planned Unit Development (PUD), to increase the current allowable 40-foot height limit.

Mendelsohn and his team have been meeting with neighborhood groups to gain support for their proposal since early 2007.

Expressing the desire that the historically quiet, green, low-rise and low-density single family home area remain so, NOA has been vocal in its opposition to the tower

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plan since its initial presentation. To date, Republic Urban Properties has not revised their plans despite their claim to be open to community input.

Mendelsohn maintains that if the tower scheme is not built – and low rise buildings in keeping with current zoning restrictions are required, the green space will be cut down and the site would be “maxed-out” with condominium units.

During the question-and-answer period, concern about additional traffic flowing onto 19th Avenue was raised. One neighbor also questioned if the State would permit access from the site onto 19th Avenue (State Highway 1) since the State prohibited such access from the development built on the Shriner Hospital site.

One questioner asked whether the land could be purchased by the City for open space as an alternative to developing the site for housing. San Francisco voters renewed the Open Space Fund in 2000 and are still contributing to the fund with a percentage of their property taxes. Both Supervisors in attendance indicated that the City would not be in a position to purchase the property.

Given the attendance, it is clear that this is an important issue to the neighborhood. Both NOA and WTPCC want to continue working with the developer's team to impress upon them the need to be good neighbors and mold the project to better fit into the neighborhood fabric.

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