

## OBSERVER

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Artists rendering of proposed Ardenwood towers. Some treeline has been removed to reflect age of trees.

## Towers on Wawona?

**Strong Neighborhood Turnout at Town Hall Questions Oversize Development**

By Eric Castongia

On November 1, a Town Hall meeting was held at St. Cecilia's Church to educate the West Portal neighborhood to a proposed 4.6-acre development on the Arden Wood Christian Science property. Arden Wood Inc. has been working on the sale of the parcel for some time; necessary in

order to absorb renovation and operating costs for the facility.

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

Central Council, moderated the energized meeting.

Guests included, the developer, Bob Mendelsohn, President of Republic Urban Properties West Coast Division, who presented the latest proposal for the site. Former Planning Department Zoning Administrator Bob Passmore answered planning questions, and Supervisor Sean Elsbernd and Carmen Chu listened and answered a few questions.

Republic Urban, the second developer for the site, after Union Property Capital LLC pulled out, has been pushing a plan to neighbors and surrounding community groups to build two high-rise towers, the tallest at 13 stories. The developer plans to file for a Planned Unit Development (PUD), to increase the current allowable 40-foot height limit, in order to build the towers.

NOA has been vocal in their opposition to the tower plan since it was presented in early 2007, as they do not accept it as a viable option; wanting the historically quiet, green and low density single family home area to remain so. To date, Republic Urban has not revised their plans despite their claim to be open to community input. Mr. Mendelsohn has stated that if the towers are not built, and low-rise buildings in keeping with current zoning restrictions are required, the green space will be cut down and site maxed out with condominium units. At a neighborhood meeting on September 24, 2007, Mr. Mendelsohn stated he would be filing plans in a matter of days for Environmental Assessment. Since that time, Mendelsohn has stated that plans will not be filed for approximately 90 days, stating that they hope to incorporate community concerns.

During the question and answer period, concern about the additional traffic flowing onto 19th Avenue was raised as a critical issue. One neighbor also questioned if the State would permit access from the site onto 19th Ave. (State Highway 1) since the state prohibited such access from the housing project built on the Shriner Hospital site. An alternative to developing this site for housing was also raised which was that the City for open space purchase the land. San Francisco voters renewed the open space fund in 2000 and are still contributing to the fund in a percentage of their property taxes. Both Supervisor Sean Elsbernd and Carmen Chu indicated that the City would not be in a position to purchase the property.

NOA considers the meeting a success, in that many of nearly 250 people attending had heard little to nothing of the development and are now more aware of happenings on the site. Sign the petition and stay involved and we build our coalition to wrestle City Hall for the preservation of our neighborhood.

*Editors note: We heard from the developer last month, now from the opponents, more to come.*