

Arden Wood developer makes significant changes

Responding to community opposition to proposed residential towers, developer's revised plan features low-rise buildings

by Eric Castongia

The developers of the proposed Arden Wood housing project sponsored two workshops in February to present their new vision for the 4.6-acre parcel. In Republic Urban's words, "you talked, we listened." The new scheme represents a significant – and welcomed – departure from the original plan loudly opposed by neighbors, which included a pair of six- and 13-story towers.

The new proposal consists of four low-rise buildings straddling a "village drive" culminating at a cul-de-sac. The revision also calls for 141 units – down from 162.

Two existing buildings – the director's house and Building 701, which currently houses staff – will be remodeled as part of the development.

Robert Mendelsohn, president of Republic Urban Properties San Francisco Branch, stated that although a Planned Unit Development will still be needed to build the project, it will be built to existing zoning guidelines within the 40-foot height limit.

Project specifics addressed a variety of environmental and traffic concerns.

According to the new plan, green space will be maintained at the perimeter of the site. About 60-75 percent of the existing trees on the property will remain.

Three walking paths – including one behind the Arden Wood Christian Science Facility – were highlighted for access from the development to the West Portal transit hub.

The entry and exit to the development will be on 19th Avenue. Cal Trans has not yet given approval for the access. The 18th Avenue and Wawona gate will be used only for emergency vehicles.

As part of the workshops, four stations were set up for participants to discuss various issues with experts regarding architecture, LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification, landscaping, Environmental Impact Reports and approvals. Although the meetings did not include a follow-up portion for group ques-

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tions, Mendelsohn said he would be happy to present the revised project to the neighborhood for input.

Arden Wood's developer is shooting for a "Gold" LEED Certification under the rating system by the U.S. Green Building Council to promote environmentally sensitive construction with renewable resources, sustainable site development (such as collecting rain water for landscape irrigation) and energy efficient construction. Republic Urban Properties plans on filing plans for an environmental evaluation application (pre-Environmental Impact Report) within the next month.

The developer indicated that they may opt to pay a fee in lieu of providing for the City's inclusionary (or workforce) housing requirement.

Neighbors seemed generally optimistic about the revised design, although most were not yet ready to give their full support. Among the outstanding community concerns were questions surround sufficient on-site parking and how site traffic will proceed south onto 19th Avenue. In a previous scheme, the site's entry and exit at traffic light at 19th Avenue and Wawona Street, allowed a left turn from the site to go south and end dangerous U-turns in front of St. Cecilia's Church.

Neighbors anticipate that some new residents will have multiple cars with not enough parking. With a "transit first" policy that discourages car use, current City requirements call for a maximum of one space per household. Given the number of commuters in this area and insufficient public transit options, neighbors see the "one car" plan as overly optimistic.

To create an acceptable project, the developer, neighbors, Cal Trans and City planners will need to remain involved and committed to resolving the issues of particular concern to this area. As a result of strong neighborhood involvement, the proposed project has undergone a substantial revision since its inception.

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