

Arden Wood Project Plan Ready for Major Step Forward

"We want to retain as much of this precious urban forest as we can, while adding housing. Going the conventional route would mean plastering the hillside with blocks of housing and cutting down a lot of trees. We don't want to do that, and the community we've heard from doesn't want that either. And we're still listening."

—Former Supervisor Bob Mendelsohn



The current Chateau at Arden Wood will not be effected by the subdivision of its 12.3 acres.

according to Mendelsohn. Neighbors frequently noted the problem of egress into 19th would create similar problems to those encountered by residents of The Grove. Driving from The Grove, south toward Stonestown or Sloat, autos must drive north along 19th and execute a U-turn or drive around the block which includes St. Cecilia's. Recognizing this problem, plans are in the works for a new road that will go to the existing intersection at 19th and Wawona, allowing drivers to head south from into the intersection itself which currently exists, albeit with no entrance from Wawona.

Developers also held early meetings with the Planning Department, St. Cecilia's and Supervisor Elsbernd. These meetings have been described as informational.

There are no plans, as yet, to break ground, and the planning and entitlement work will likely take another year to 18 months. Construction itself will not begin for at least 2 more years. ♦

Bob Mendelsohn, is the President of Republic Urban Properties, West Coast Division. Headquarters are in San Francisco and San Jose.

Developers of the Arden Wood Project are in the final stages of their application for an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) on property obtained through a subdivision of Arden Wood, a property once entirely owned by the Christian Science Church that has housed a senior citizen facility since the 1930's. The Church and the current operator, non-profit Arden Wood, Inc., has managed to keep the heavily wooded area intact for over 75 years, but costs associated with renovations at the senior center made subdivision a necessity.

"It doesn't make sense to buy such a unique piece of property and reduce it to a suburban style landscape," Republic Urban's West Coast President Bob Mendelsohn said. "Although the current zoning code allows for 199 units at 40 ft heights, we're really trying to go in the other direction. In order to do that, we need to build higher to keep the footprint smaller, and that way we'll retain 75% of the forest in its current condition. Our plan calls for only 160 units — 130 of the units would be located in two mid-rise buildings.

"Keeping the beautiful dense urban forest intact, as much as possible, will require building higher rather than the usual sprawl that characterizes most urban development today. The area's site with nearby mass transit is appropriate for a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) higher density, taller buildings," according to Mendelsohn, who for many years lived nearby with his family.

According to Mark Nelson, an advisor to the Board of the non-profit, the renovations are estimated to cost \$23 million, which prompted the Board to sell off 4.5 acres for development. Nelson is currently developing seven single family houses along 15th and Wawona which he purchased from Arden Wood, Inc. in a separate agreement. The board chose Republic through a series of competitions. The initial choice of the Board failed to go forward, so they initiated a second competition and the development was finally awarded to Republic Urban Properties.

The plans also indicate eight single family homes along 19th, set back with trees and screening vegetation to shield the residences from busy traffic noise along the street. Another house, which currently serves as the Director's residence, will remain as it is. A lodge is also planned which will serve as work force housing for teachers or firefighters.

Republic Urban has been meeting with various community groups since the agreement was signed in February. Neighbors weighed in with some familiar concerns, including the height of the buildings and the increased traffic on local streets around 18th and Wawona, including the Greater West Portal Neighborhood Association and the West of Twin Peaks Central Council.

Due to their input, plans for traffic to and from the project will be limited to 19th Avenue, with minimal use of the gate at 18th and Wawona to east.