

Watsonville
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City Council OKs 298-unit condominium project

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The Watsonville City Council last night, with Councilwoman Betty Murphy dissenting, took a series of actions to pave the way for a condominium project to be built next to Ramsay Park.

Mort Console, who proposed the 298-unit project 10 months ago, is offering 20 of the units to the city for free. Despite the offer, action on the project, called Valle Vista, had been postponed twice while the council hashed out problems with the impacts on traffic, schools and the environment.

The council's actions included ruling that an environmental impact report was sufficient, amending the city's General Plan and rezoning some of the property, and approving a tentative map.

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— City Councilwoman Betty Murphy

EIR dealt adequately with traffic or with having all the streets, sewers and water lines be private and maintained by the homeowners association.

"I don't want to take a chance with this," she said.

She said she didn't think the homes would be affordable when the cost of maintaining the infrastructure was added and that the project, which will consist of one-bedroom, large and small two-bedroom, and three-bedroom condominiums, doesn't meet the needs of people with large fami-

lies.

"I don't think it meets the needs of Watsonville people who have families," she said.

Councilman Lowell Hurst joined Murphy on some of the "no" votes, saying he thought the EIR was "pretty iffy" on some of the issues and he was concerned about density. The units would be built in three clusters on 17.4 acres.

"I feel the project is too dense," he said. "I've been saying that all along ... It seems to me that this is an experiment, and you don't

know how an experiment is going to turn out ... for some reason it just doesn't feel right to me ... but there's a challenged there and I say, 'Let's see (Console) do it.'"

Mayor Todd McFarren, explaining his support for the project, said the city is going to have to consider higher densities if it is going to meet its twin goals of preserving agricultural land and providing housing. Balanced against that, he said, is maintaining a relatively high quality of life, and the Console project "makes a good faith attempt at doing that."

Councilman Oscar Rios said he agreed with Murphy that the homes would not meet the needs of larger families or "the very very poor."

The developer's representatives showed the council a videotape of a similar development in Half Moon Bay and passed out pictures showing what the condos looked like inside. A model of the Valle Vista project is on display in the lobby at City Hall, and the representatives presented a slide show of the model with a backdrop behind it to give the council an idea

of what the project would look like from various vantage points.

Besides the three open-space areas around which the condos will be clustered, playgrounds, walkways, garages and carports, and the private streets, sewers and water mains, the developer will make several off-site improvements. The improvements include extending Clifford Street; adding such features as curbs, gutters and sidewalks to Harkins Slough Road and Main Street; work on Watsonville Slough Bridge; and enhancement of 7.4 acres of slough.

The council placed several conditions on approval of changes needed for the project, including the option of taking the 20 units or requiring that 25 percent of the condos be made affordable.

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REFERENCE

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