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Watsonville council rejects high-density housing plan

By JAMIE MARKS
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WATSONVILLE — Bowing to pressure from neighbors, the City Council voted Tuesday night to reject a rezoning application for residential land on Green Valley Road in favor of a smaller project.

Several dozen speakers packed the City Council chamber for the second time in recent weeks to protest the proposed rezoning of the 2.75-acre property from industrial to high-density housing.

On the other side, three residents of the Federal Emergency Management Agency trailer park at Crestview Avenue urged the council to support the high-density request.

"You cannot just push us aside, just because we're a different class of people," said a woman in Spanish, through an interpreter.

Jose Portillo urged the opponents to "take our place. We need more help in construction of housing for the Hispanics."

The land used to belong to Sunbay Florists, and was tentatively approved two months ago for R-3, high-density housing, after only a few speakers opposed it.

But in the face of overwhelming

neighborhood opposition, the City Council voted unanimously to refer the issue back to the Planning Commission for reconsideration to lower-density housing.

A prior motion to approve the high-density rezoning failed on a 4-2 vote, with councilmembers Betty Murphy and Oscar Rios casting the only votes in favor of the denser zoning.

Rios said he was concerned about the issues being raised, but he wondered about where the people making low wages would be able to live. He suggested at least 20 percent of the project be set aside for low-income residents.

Councilman Lowell Hurst had to abstain because of a potential conflict of interest.

Green Valley Partners had planned to build 30 home-ownership units on the 3.6-acre property, of which 2.75 acres are buildable.

Under high-density zoning, the land could hold 20 units an acre, if sufficient land was held aside for roads and other improvements. Medium-density housing would only allow a total of only 20 units because of the different criteria in the

zoning district.

Char Richey, a Hope Drive resident and neighbor of the project, read a statement outlining the neighbors' opposition.

The decision to create the greatest amount of housing on the least amount of land will create a city with less appeal, she said.

"Multiple housing can be achieved without over-zoning Watsonville," Richey said.

Richey said children have a difficult time crossing Green Valley Road, the main thoroughfare to the project, as it is. More housing will make it unbearable, she said.

Joe DiSalazar, a neighbor, suggested what was needed was a park.

Chris Seymour, a police officer, researched the number of traffic accidents on Green Valley Road near the project and said 65 accidents had occurred in a little over three years.

Public Works Director John Cooper said Green Valley Road is about to be improved, including the addition of left-turn lanes to side streets. He said that should help reduce the number of traffic accidents.