

# Aptos seniors project alive, despite protest

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SANTA CRUZ — The affluent Aptos Hills will have to accept an affordable housing project for the elderly, despite vehement objections from residents that the project doesn't fit with their neighborhood.

After a raucous hearing Wednesday night, planning commissioners voted 4-1, with Pajaro Valley Commissioner Ed Hall dissenting, to maintain a medium-density zoning on the controversial La Mirada project, thus keeping the project alive.

La Mirada is planned as 35 units of housing for poor seniors, and 15 townhouses that will be sold at the normal selling price. The firm of Davidson, Cavanaugh and Brezzo of San Jose is developing the project.

"It's important when we do planning that we consider what kind of community we're providing ... not just for the affluent," said Chairwoman Denise Holbert. "I don't want to see the Carmelization of Santa Cruz County.

"Nobody likes to have these projects next to them," she added. "I think it's time to face the music and be responsible."

"I'm a little puzzled by the attitude of the people ... many who came out and supported the Carlino Project," said Scotts Valley Commissioner Myrna Britton. (The Carlino project is up the road from La Mirada. It has been approved as a 50-lot subdivision with single residences on 30 acres.)

"I'm a little puzzled why La Mirada should take more than its fair share of controversy," said Britton. "One point that's been made by other groups in other areas of the county is that they've taken more than their fair share of low-income housing, particularly in Live Oak.

"I think we need affordable housing, and I don't want to pass up the project if it works," said Britton.

The commission's action was unusual in that it voted to "grandfather in" the La Mirada project, in recognition of its previous approval. But if the project should fail, then the 3.2-acre site would automatically be down zoned to low density, said Aptos Commissioner Ree Burnap.

Although the hearing was ostensibly called to discuss the redesign of the Aptos Village Plan, most of the debate focused on La Mirada.

The rezoning of the commercial area of Aptos Village passed smoothly by comparison. Only three speakers objected to it.

The commission voted to add a clause to the new commercial zoning, stating that businesses would be limited to "those which reinforce a sense of community in the village ... with mixed residential development and service and goods to meet primarily local needs."

Adult book stores were specifically precluded, in conformance with county code restrictions.

Aptos residents, led by those who live on Quail Run Road, which is closest to La Mirada, argued they don't want La Mirada.

Sometimes arguing erupted between a speaker and a commissioner.

Said Michael Sorrels, who identified himself as a Realtor, "We keep putting people into these areas, but when is it going to end?"

Live Oak Commissioner Skip Eberly shot back he agreed that Santa Cruz is overcrowded, but suggested that maybe the younger generation will "have to have population control or birth control."

Another speaker rose to remind commissioners they have control over how high the densities will be.

"The plan is being revised, downzoning much of the village, but there's already an unworkable traffic situation," she said.

"We're not against senior affordable housing," added Veronica Ferguson. "But we don't want it on this specific site at that density."

Chuck Monard, of Quail Run Road Homeowners Association, said the La Mirada site was "under water in 1982."

The drainage from three ridges runs into the swale at La Mirada, he said, making it virtually impossible to build a project without extraordinary expense.

The financial viability of La Mirada was questioned by Aptos resident David Rock, who said the developers had gone into default on the property to the tune of \$247,903.41. He produced a copy of the notice of default.

John Brezzo, of the development firm, later replied that was true, but added the project is still alive.

"We're not about to pay \$250,000 and get jacked around like this," he said. Brezzo's project has been before the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors on four separate occasions in two years, he said.

Brezzo said the development firm is still seeking a loan from Farmers Home Administration to help finance the senior part of the project.

"We built another project in this county and had a good rapport with staff," said Brezzo. "They encouraged us 500 percent to pursue this project."

Brezzo said he couldn't understand why, if the county's land-use policies General Plan and Measure J all encourage the kind of development he is pursuing, the project should run into such adamant opposition.

The majority of commissioners ultimately agreed with Brezzo, and voted to support the zoning that allows La Mirada to be built at 50 units.

At the same time, the density in the rest of Aptos Village has been cut in half by the commission's action, to 170 units.

The recommendations go to the Board of Supervisors in June for final action.

## REFERENCE