

Local

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Watsonville council allows Landmark zoning change

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Plans moved forward last night for a portion of the proposed 900-unit Landmark Estates development, an 18-acre site on Errington Road that would be used for up to 236 affordable units.

The Watsonville City Council approved a zoning change for the parcel, changing the designation from industrial use to residential.

The entire project, which is on 150 acres on the northwest side of town, is in the environmental review stage. But the landowner, Jerry Lohr, and the Mid-Peninsula Housing Corp., who are working together to develop the affordable housing component, are hoping to

get some federal and state funds to help pay for the construction of the units.

They needed to have the zoning change in place before submitting their application, which has to be turned in within a few days. The zoning change does not mean that the project has been approved.

Fran Wagstaff, of the housing corporation, said her agency was expecting about \$5.6 million from a federal low-income tax credit program and additional funds from the state. She said it was important that the application be made this year, because the future of the funding programs is in question.

Wagstaff's agency, which has

built 1,600 units over the 20 years it's been in existence, is proposing to build 136 rental units. The remaining 100 would be affordable for-sale units developed by Lohr. Rents for the units, which would have two and three bedrooms, would range from \$228 to \$605 per month. Preference would be given to people who were displaced by the earthquake and those who live or work in Watsonville, she said.

Asked by Mayor Todd McFarren to respond to community fears that having so many low-income units on one parcel would be creating a slum, Wagstaff offered to give tours of her agency's other projects, which she said are in "like new" condition. Wagstaff said

her agency also provides management for their units and "gets good tenants."

Several speakers, including Christine Johnson-Lyons, agency administrator for the Community Action Board, and Kathy Bernard, director of the Pajaro Valley Affordable Housing Corp., spoke in favor of the project.

Only one person, Louis Jemison, who raises lettuce next to the site, objected to the zoning change and the project. Jemison said the residential use would be incompatible with farming.

In particular, Jemison said he was worried about people who live in the project walking through his field and that he would not be

allowed to do aerial spraying of crops because his field would be surrounded by housing.

He also said he thought it would be bad for the residents of the project to live near a commercial farming operation because of the dust, noise, pesticides and farming-related smells. He charged that the EIR now being reviewed for the project didn't deal with those things adequately.

Although Lohr and various council members said they thought things could be worked out, Jemison said, "It's just going to really kill us."

The council also gave the zoning change a "negative declaration,"

which essentially says that all the environmental effects of the project can be dealt with sufficiently.

Bob Peterson, head of the business office for the Pajaro Valley Unified School District, said that the district was concerned about the project's impact on local schools. The project is expected to add about 840 students over the next six or seven years, increasing the student population in the district by 5.4 percent.

Earlier, the district had taken issue with the negative declaration. Last night, however, Peterson said the district was working with the developer on funding for a new school to handle the increase.