

Rio group challenges conclusions in Sumner Woods EIR

An environmental impact report on the proposed 78-unit Sumner Woods townhouse project should be rejected by the Santa Cruz County Planning Commission, the project's opponents are saying today.

The commission is scheduled to hold a public hearing tonight at 7:30 p.m. in the Santa Cruz County governmental center, 701 Ocean St., on the environmental impact report, an addendum covering traffic circulation problems in the Rio del Mar area, and impacts on the school system.

In a letter to the commission, John McSweeney, chairman of Concerned Citizens of Rio del Mar, said his group considers the EIR "invalid" because it ignores some crucial issues.

"The EIR reflects a one-sided case in favor of the developers," McSweeney said. "Essential elements of a complete EIR such as availability of water, impact on schools, land use conformity with the character of the neighborhood, were not included in the draft and final EIR."

The group is asking the commission to delay further public hearings on the project until a new EIR is written.

The group is critical of the county's process in determining what issues should be discussed in an environmental impact report, and is asking the commission to investigate the decision-making process "which determines the elements to be included in each EIR and establish the necessary controls to assure protection of the public's interests, including both the developers and community interests."

One problem raised by the Concerned Citizens is the financial loss that could be sustained by surrounding homeowners if the high density project goes through.

McSweeney figures that the 78 units, selling at \$125,000 each, coupled with an 18 percent profit margin, would net the developer — Hawaiian-San Francisco Co. — a new profit of \$1,755,000.

But if the project is cut as is now proposed by the group, to 47 homes, selling for an average of \$145,000 each, the net profit (15 percent) would be \$1,022,250.

"The difference in the profit picture appears substantial; however, when compared to the loss in property values that the 150 local homeowners would be forced to accept, without recourse," McSweeney added, is not great.

The 78 unit development, built at the density of one per unit 4,000 square feet, would result in an average 25 percent devaluation of the surrounding 150 homes — or a \$4.5 million net loss, the group claims.

However, the group is figuring only a 10 percent loss for the area if the 47-home counter-proposal is accepted by the planning commission. That would mean a "net loss" to the neighbors of \$1.8 million.

"There is no doubt," McSweeney told the commission in the letter, "that the Planned Unit Developments such as Sumner Woods have a degrading and adverse effect on the value of homes in residential communities.

"Real estate brokers, real estate appraisers and average home buyers are aware of home devaluation when a large multiple housing project is constructed.

"It is recognized that multiple housing and clustered housing are necessary as available lands shrink and housing costs rise; however, there are two elements in EIRs which, if

investigated justly, would restrict large developments from damaging property values to the extent that the proposed Sumner Woods development most assuredly would. The two factors (are) Land Use in Conformity with the Character of the Neighborhood, and Materially Injurious to Surrounding Properties, should always be carefully researched and objectively presented in an EIR," McSweeney added.

Critiquing the EIR ad-

dendum on school and traffic impact, the group commented: "The overcrowded conditions will be catastrophic when the other pending large housing projects in Rio del Mar, Aptos and Seascape are considered.

"Just the buildup of vacant single-family lots in the area is more than the school system can support. The only "mitigation" proposed in the study was to impose school impact fees on the developers of \$500 per unit.

"Why wasn't the cost of educating 76 students compared directly with the funds generated from the 'impact' fees?" McSweeney asked, referring to the estimated number of new students to be generated from the project.

"An official in the Pajaro School District advises that the cost of educating one student through the 12th grade averages approximately \$1,500 a year, excluding building costs. As related to the proposed development, the

project would add \$114,000 a year to school costs."

The group is also challenging the traffic study performed by Jacobs, Haro and Associates.

Pointing out the traffic counts used by consultant Myron Jacobs included three very stormy weather days, the group is challenging the entire report.

"Factoring the weather element into the report would have resulted in a completely different conclusion," Mc-

Sweeney said. "The omission of reporting the weather conditions on the three days of survey, along with other errors and omissions found in the survey, proves the lack of objectivity in preparing the report."

And the group noted that traffic flows had dropped 27 percent in a three year period when comparing Dec. 14, 1976, figures for Clubhouse Drive, at Rio del Mar Blvd., of 8,780 with the consultant's Dec. 21, 1979 results of 6,380 cars.

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