

Big apartment complex wins planners' approval

By NANCY BARR
STAFF WRITER

A congregate-care apartment complex next to Valley Convalescent Hospital won the approval of the Watsonville Planning Commission last night.

The 76-unit development, proposed by Richard Murphy and Gaylord Chilcote, is intended for elderly people who can still live on their own but need some help with certain daily chores. The complex would be behind the convalescent hospital, which is on Freedom Boulevard at West High Street.

John Fry, project manager, said he would expect most residents to be 70 years of age or older and to have some kind of physical ailment. Three meals a day would be provided to residents, as would services to change bed linens and to provide transportation to doctor appointments and shopping.

The project was rejected by the Planning Commission in August because it would have brought traffic onto the residential Gonzales and West High streets.

The project was redesigned before returning to the commission last night. It now sets the only access to the apartment complex from a driveway off Freedom Boulevard, north of the convalescent hospital. Planning Director Bud Carney indicated in his staff report that he would prefer access to the project from High Street but

that the new design is acceptable. The redesigned project also would have a gate at the end of West High Street to allow emergency access to the development.

In response to concerns of Gonzales Street residents, who said the gate on West High might eventually be opened for public use, the commission required the developer to deed a one-foot-wide strip of land in front of the gate to the city. That strip would be designated for no-access, so the city would have to approve any change that would allow ordinary traffic to use that entrance.

Several planning commissioners expressed concern about traffic generated by apartment residents, and thought perhaps there should be a minimum age for residency, since older people would be less likely to drive.

Commissioner Eric Anders-

son, however, said he was fully in support of the project, and that any age limit would be "arbitrary and capricious." Andersson, an assistant administrator at Watsonville Community Hospital, said he was probably more familiar than most with the idea of a congregate-care facility, and said it would be an asset to the community.

"I think this project is a godsend for Watsonville. I think there's a ready market in the Pajaro Valley for this," he said.

There would be no need for an age limit in the apartments, Andersson said, because it is not likely people would live there unless they had a physical problem for which they needed assistance.

In the end, the commission went along with Andersson, giving unanimous approval to the project, with Commissioner Charles Reinhart absent.