

Carbonera condominium project approved

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SANTA CRUZ — Carbonera Estates residents on Tuesday failed to block a condominium project they say will ruin the quality of their well-to-do neighborhoods.

Despite vigorous arguments from residents that condominiums are not in keeping with the single-family houses in Carbonera Estates, the City Council voted 6-1, with Councilman Spiro Mellis dissenting, to approve 16 units by developers Don Fultz and Gary Reece.

Steering clear of the term, "condominiums," the developers depicted the units as two-story "single-family attached homes," to be built into hillsides, using recent technology for energy efficiency.

Cost of the units will be from \$200,000 to \$250,000, said Reece.

The project, to be built on four acres of a steeply-sloped 15-acre site at 801 Isbel Drive, had originally been planned for 22 units last year, but was scaled down to overcome opposition.

Opponents refused to buy the developers' argument that the units are not condominiums.

Residents' spokeswoman Nance Lee McKendrick said Carbonera Estates was developed for single-family lots only, and should stay that way.

Residents are "diametrically opposed to any development other than single-family residential lots," said McKendrick.

Residents said the project would jeopardize the water supply, further increase water pressure problems, cause more fire and traffic safety hazards, particularly for neighborhood children.

Under the conditions of approval the development cannot move forward until water, sewer and fire prevention facilities are upgraded to the satisfaction of authorities.

Another condition of approval requires the developers to pay their fair share of costs to make the roads safer. The Council directed city Traffic Commissioners to consult with residents and the developers and to make recommendations on safety improvements.

The residents called on the council to "maintain the integrity" of the neighborhood and to uphold previous promises they say were made to keep development other than single-family lots out of

Carbonera Estates.

They noted council members have previously voted with neighborhood groups in opposing developments and asked the same be done in Carbonera Estates.

The developers argued the residents would not have to worry about the neighborhood being overrun by renters, because the high cost of the units would make them unfeasible for rentals.

"Frankly, I'm not really convinced the lifestyles of the residents will be directly impacted by this project," said Councilman Michael Rotkin. "I don't believe the development is doing anything that will destroy the neighborhood," he said.

Added Councilman Arnold Levine: "Nobody is guaranteed a private road in front of his home."

"I think they will be very nice homes," commented Councilwoman Jane Weed.

Councilwoman Katy Sears-Williams said, "I don't think this property is being developed on a whim."

Mellis, a Carbonera Estates' resident, who lives close to the development site, sided with the residents.

He said the planning staff report on the project did not address all the problems.

Mellis added: "Maybe the project isn't going to spoil the neighborhood, but, in these people's minds, it is going to spoil it."

"I have a real concern that this council will listen to certain neighborhoods and won't listen to others."

Rotkin called the comment an "unfair" appraisal of past council decisions. He said projects have been both approved and denied in various neighborhoods.

One feature is an "earth-contact" design that buries part of each building into the slope for energy efficiency.

But residents maintained there was nothing innovative about the design, and that the condominiums would be cold and damp.

Also, McKendrick said the city was legally bound to follow a master plan for Carbonera Estates that marks the sites for single-family lots.

After the council decision to approve the project, McKendrick said residents will file a lawsuit on the basis the council acted in "bad faith" by not following the master plan used at the time the property was annexed to the city.

The council decision showed that "all neighborhoods are not treated equally," said McKendrick.