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Planning Commission Weighs Balloons vs. Poles

By Cathy Tyson

Photosimulation courtesy of KB Home for proposed Town Center III project.

Jeb Bennett, Project Manager for KB Homes, outlined his firm's preference for using large helium balloons and anchoring them with ropes to keep them in place on a non-windy day. ... continued on page A11

How best to erect story poles on a constrained lot? Just behind Panda Express is a one and a half acre gravel BART overflow parking lot. Although it doesn't look like much now, after a long, complicated history current developer KB Home has proposed a five story, eighty-one unit apartment complex for the site. Back in August of 2010, story poles were determined to be required when an official application for this project was submitted.

"The problem is the guy wires, that's why they are proposing this alternative," said Lafayette Senior Planner Christine Sinnette at a recent Planning Commission meeting explaining the rationale behind balloons. While it's not unusual to have story poles for neighbors and city staff to get a sense of how tall a second story home addition will be, because the proposed building is approximately seventy feet tall - the poles, either wood or metal, would need a substantial amount of support and anchoring to keep them steady. In researching the project, KB Home found only one construction company, Swinerton, that has ever erected story poles that tall using wood. After reviewing the plans a Swinerton representative commented, "I do not see how we can do it with conventional wood story poles."

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