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Testing the Waters for Possible Townhouse Project at Celia's Site

By Cathy Tyson



Illustrative plan Provided

Tang's, who has worked on projects from China to Korea to Russia and has an extensive portfolio of designs in California, the first stab garnered lengthy comments from the various agencies in attendance. Calling the site a "wonderful opportunity" with convenient proximity to downtown, recreation and BART, Tang pointed out how it fits into a transitional area that moves from Lafayette's commercial downtown toward the more residential feel of the west end.

While no final decision was made, suggestions covered everything from guest parking to the motor court to the recreation center, and touched on height limit concerns.

Design Review Commissioner and professional architect Andre Ptasynski called the preliminary drawings, "anything but transitional" and noted that the designated live/work units proposed for half of the frontage along Mt. Diablo Boulevard thrive on pedestrian traffic and there isn't enough at that location. Many agreed that although the concept of live/work units is interesting, they never seem to pan out. Noise and truck traffic across the street at Diamond K was also a concern.

Suggestions were made to cluster the buildings to have a less linear look, and to consider having something besides a residential unit at the corner of Dolores and Mt. Diablo.

Hinting at the challenging experience with the KB Home project, in which there was a certain amount of tone-deafness on the part of the developer to design comments and suggestions, planning commissioner Tom Chastain was blunt, noting that it would be "incredibly troublesome to see it (architectural plans) come back in the same form." He opined that modest changes will not work.

Mayor Mike Anderson echoed that sentiment as the meeting wrapped up, "You need to break the mold on this," and "a lot more work needs to be done."

Lennar Homes, potential developer of 47 proposed townhouses, asked for feedback from the city of Lafayette at a joint pow-wow that included the Planning Commission, Design Review Commission and the City Council - and feedback they got, in bucketfuls; but it was less than enthusiastic.

A colorful Power Point presentation by Lennar's architect Chek Tang of Studio T-Sq outlined preliminary rough designs for the 2-acre site that now houses Celia's restaurant along with two adjoining parcels on the western edge of the property. Rows of townhomes would face two interior motor courts with garages on the lowest level, compressed on the Mt. Diablo side of the site, to allow for non-developable easement over the massive EBMUD water pipe that runs roughly east to west bisecting the property. A tiny triangular sliver next to the freeway would be the future home of a pool and generous recreation center for residents. The plan included improvements for the EBMUD aqueduct portion of the property that would include public space along a multi-use path.

Although this is clearly not Lennar's first rodeo, nor

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