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Beginning March 8, 2014. 2p-3p.

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Please RSVP:

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Steep Lots on Happy Valley Still Challenging

By Cathy Tyson

An application to build two homes on a pair of steep, fairly constrained vacant parcels on Happy Valley Road continues to have issues. The initial building request for the project came in late 2011, with public hearings starting in 2012. At that time the Lafayette Planning Commission didn't support city staff's recommendation to approve the project. It was discussed again in August of 2013 and the project recently returned to the commission with design plans that have been adjusted in response to concerns about the size and mass of the structure, drainage – an especially sensitive topic to downhill neighbors – and sight distance to the shared, sloped driveway along busy Happy Valley Road.

The Phase I Hillside Development Permit would approve the siting and massing of two new, approximately 5,600 and 5,700 gross square foot, two-story homes; this measurement includes living and garage areas. Combined, the two properties total over 12.5 acres, but only a relatively small section of the long narrow lots are buildable, even with considerable soil remediation.

Designer Steven Kubitschek responded to planning commissioners at their Feb. 18 meeting, "We've done what you've asked us to do." He explained that the applicants have met with the neighbors and "tried to satisfy them to the extent possible," and prepared an engineer's report, that included a sight distance evaluation by third party National Data and Surveying Services, and two hydrology re-

ports. He concluded that the applicant Melcor Homes has "met and exceeded the sight distance requirement," and adjusted the architecture to be smaller and set back into the hillside.

Longtime city engineer Tony Coe reviewed the grading and drainage plans along with sight distance plans, and has had multiple conversations with concerned neighbors and the project engineer; he is satisfied with the plans.

Nearby neighbors spoke out against the homes, describing how they will "loom" over Happy Valley Road and urging commissioners to consider another hydrology report and continue to reduce the size of the homes, and commenting on the enormous amount of impervious surface that would be created if they were built.

Planning commissioner Tom Chastain pointed out that these are legal lots and the owner has a right to build there.

After some discussion about the retaining walls, the water runoff situation, building sizes and expressing confidence in the city engineer and his review, commissioners preferred to have a west side entrance to the property and supported a 20 percent reduction in the size of the house on the eastern side of the property. They also voiced their concerns about the capacity of the property. Tom Chastain opined that it is "hard to definitively say how much is too much." Phase I was approved; Phase II will be discussed in March with the Design Review Commission.

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