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Condos proposed for Lafayette Circle

By Pippa Fisher

Plans for the proposed mixed-purpose retail/condominiums development on Lafayette Circle are moving forward to the consent calendar for resolution and conditions of approval in early September.



Commissioners heard from city staff and from the developer, Lenox Homes' president Dan Freeman, together with architect Newell Arnerich who described the proposed 12-unit condo building at the Aug. 6 planning commission meeting.

The three-story structure will sit at 210 Lafayette Circle, on the site of the old Spruzzo's restaurant and a parking lot, neighboring the site of last year's fire that burned the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce offices and the La Finestra restaurant.

Images provided

Utilizing a mixture of natural materials, the project comprises 12 residential units ranging in living space size from 657 square feet to 1,813 square feet including two units on the first floor, which will be ADA-accessible and available at below market rates to moderate-income households. Additionally the project will provide 1,007 square feet of ground floor retail space. It features a courtyard, and terraces and balconies on all levels.

City Planning and Building Director Niroop Srivatsa explained that the project complies with the general plan as well as the downtown specific plan for the area. It complies with parking requirements, utilizing car lifts to save garage space. Notably it provides considerable bike storage, too, which combined with enhanced pathways, is part of an attempt to discourage the use of cars, said Arnerich.

A pathway will lead back to the creek and the developer will work in time with the city to provide a bridge over the creek.

Srivatsa explained to the commissioners that the project has been before the design review commission twice and that they are now recommending the PC approve the project, with certain recommendations, many of which the developer is already working on such as meeting the public art requirement.

The commission took public comment, hearing from seven individuals, mostly neighbors who expressed their desire to see this project move forward. One neighbor, however, did not support it, saying that this would be more appropriate to Walnut Creek or San Francisco.

Planning Commissioner Kristina Sturm expressed some concern over creek frontage use, hoping that a more active use will be encouraged, suggesting perhaps a bench and educational signage.

Planning Commission Vice Chair Steven Bliss suggested this was a "keystone project" and said that he was glad to see the effort made by the applicant to work with the city in their direction.

A motion recommending approval subject to conditions was supported unanimously. Staff will now prepare a draft approval resolution and conditions of approval, which will appear as a consent calendar item at the Sept. 4 meeting.



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