

Development Standards and Design Guidelines Adopted for High Density Sites in Pleasanton

The Pleasanton City Council adopted development standards and designed guidelines for nine properties rezoned for high density housing.

The city is required to have the new guidelines and regulations in place by the end of September to meet a deadline agreed to as part of its lawsuit settlement with Urban Habitat. As a result of the Urban Habitat lawsuit, a court invalidated the city's 29,000 unit housing cap and ordered it to rezone properties to provide an opportunity for development of more affordable housing.

The vote for the standards and guidelines was 3 to 1 with Cindy McGovern opposed. Mayor Jennifer

Hosterman was absent.

McGovern was concerned that there was inadequate open space where children could play. She pointed out that the units would have more children than the usual high density apartments in the city. The designation of 1600 square feet of open space per 101 units is not enough. "We have not planned well for children," McGovern declared.

City Manager Nelson Fialho suggested that as a way to encourage more open space that there be an emphasis placed on its importance as each project comes forward. If it is not possible to provide the open space on site, developers would pay an in lieu fee that could be

used to build trails to current parks, Fialho stated.

McGovern also didn't agree with the densities designated for each site, nor the allowed height for buildings. She felt the buildings were too tall.

At a workshop held earlier this year, councilmembers also questioned the densities, feeling they were greater than the zoning allowed at a minimum of either 30 to 40 units per acre. However, according to the standards, a site could develop at various ranges, such as 14 to 25 units in one area and 50 to 85 units in another location. The council wanted a maximum density listed along with the minimum.

Brian Dolan, Director of

Community Development, explained that the numbers reflected what was studied as part of the supplemental environmental impact report. He said that the council could take the minimum of 30 to 40 acres and add five units to establish a maximum density. The maximum number of units identified in the EIR for each site would be removed from the development standards.

The council adopted that proposal as part of the final standards.

Dolan said later that projects are starting to come in. Developers are having a hard time meeting the 30 unit density requirements. "In a lot of cases, it is difficult to build that many units on a particular site."

There were also questions about uses allowed on the site adjacent to the east Pleasanton BART station. The concern related to wording that could allow up to 100 units per acre on the site. The same site could also be the location of a hotel with 10 to 15 story towers. Staff suggested that development standards and design guidelines be deferred for this location until more is known about plans that may be submitted for it. The council agreed.

Members of the public were not happy with the higher densities in the newly zoned properties, nor the fact that in the future Pleasanton

would have to accommodate even more units as assigned by ABAG. The reference was to 2058 units the city would have to plan for between 2014 and 2022.

The current housing element includes 2747 units, 747 over the assigned ABAG numbers through 2014. Dolan said that the extra housing in the current housing element would be used to help meet the new 2058 units designated by ABAG.

David Miller stated, "Citizens once had a say in planning a community. Those days are over." He pointed out that the city is told that it needs higher density low income housing. "We are being forced to accommodate this pack and stack housing against our will. This is not the end. It's the beginning." He wondered if the city had challenged the new ABAG numbers.

Councilmember Matt Sullivan said, "It's still not a perfect plan. I have concerns about open space. However, these are urban developments. That's what we are forced into. We've done the best that we can. There is a major benefit to having guidelines. Without them, developers could come in and build anything. The guidelines help to protect the community."

Councilmember Cheryl Cook-Kallio said that working through a settlement

over the lawsuit allowed the city to gain some land control over what it is forced to accomplish. That includes the ability to establish standards and guidelines. "We worked very hard to retain elements we believe are important when it comes to children, schools, open space and quality of life." She too was concerned about open space.

Councilmember Jerry Thorne liked providing a range of units for each site. "I don't want to lock us into a corner. The council will review each project as it comes in. A range of numbers will hopefully provide us the flexibility we need to approve a good plan that may not meet the standards."

Thorne said that local control is a very important issue. He pointed out that right now there are nineteen different bills in the legislature that would take away some local control.

The standards and design guidelines approved by the council will provide direction to developers and property owners on the key components of use, density, building mass and height, setbacks, architectural features, open space, parking and site circulation.

Developers are expected to meet the development standards. A PUD process will allow the city council to make changes if specific circumstances preclude the use of the standards.