

Council approves BRE housing project for Hacienda

5-0 vote for non-union project comes as 100 union leaders, members crowd council chamber

By JEB BING

Facing a packed meeting room of more than 100 construction union leaders and their members, the Pleasanton City Council on Tuesday night nevertheless voted 5-0 to approve a multi-million-dollar housing project in Hacienda Business Park to be built by BRE, a national affordable housing developer that uses non-union labor.

Union members applauded speakers who urged the council to insist that BRE agree to use union members, although they also endorsed the project and recognized the council's inability from a legal standpoint to add that provision in the final approved measure.

Both council members and union leaders said that efforts to come to an agreement with BRE over mixing the workforce complex with union and non-union labor had failed.

The vote came after two hours of discussion and ended more than a year of public hearings, workshops and task force considerations on the

mammoth housing project that will help meet the city's court-ordered requirement to provide more affordable, workforce housing here.

BRE will build a total of 18 three- and four-story buildings on two separate sites in Hacienda that will have just over 500 rental units ranging in size from studio apartments to three-bedroom units, although most will be two bedroom apartments. Of the 500 apartments, roughly 15% will be reserved as subsidized units for low income households, in accordance with the court-approved settlement agreement.

BRE representatives told city officials that the company has financing available to start construction after permits have been issued, with groundbreaking to take place later this year.

In terms of the council's consideration of the BRE project, there was little that was new in Tuesday night's final public hearing. Details of the project had been discussed at scores of public meetings involving hundreds of people. In

addition to the months of meetings by a council-appointed Hacienda Task Force, the project also went through environmental reviews and hearings before the city's Parks and Recreation, Housing and Planning commissions.

BRE agreed to keep the apartment densities at 30 to the acre, not much higher than in other Pleasanton apartment and condo complexes, and far under the high density housing seen across I-580 in Dublin. Even so, with their somewhat stark, four-story architecture, the new buildings may not have "that Pleasanton look," as some critics suggested.

The two building sites include a mixed-use, high density residential and commercial development containing 251 residential units, four live/work units and approximately 5,700 square feet of retail space at the southeast corner of Owens Drive and Willow Road.

The second, similar project will have 247 resi-

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dential units, another four live/work units and a half-acre public park at the northern corner of Gibraltar and Hacienda drives.

The project is an outcome of the settlement agreement between the city and Urban Habitat, an Oakland-based affordable housing coalition that successfully sued the city over its 1996 housing cap and lack of adequate affordable, workforce housing.

Much of the discussion Tuesday night centered on union and non-union labor on city construction projects. Labor leaders said that by using below-scale non-union construction workers, those working on the BRE project will not have incomes sufficient to actually

ever live in the buildings. Health care and other benefits also will likely be below union standards, which union leaders said always includes "fair wages," health insurance, pension plans and often 401(k) savings plans.

"We're a key player in this area in providing benefits for our workers and in supporting projects benefiting the area, such as BART to Livermore and our Friendship program for training apprentices," Rick Silva of the Sheet metal workers' union said. "Beyond this BRE project, I know that Pleasanton will be building some 1,600 new homes in the future and we hope you'll work with developers to make sure they consider union labor."

Another union leader told the council that BRE is "a wealthy company and they need to learn

to share."

"The development agreement should say that you expect BRE will hire a certain number of union workers," he added. "You should make sure they pay fair wages."

But Frank Capilla, whose Pleasanton-based Can-Am Plumbing business is one of the largest in the area, said that although he was a longtime union supporter and booster, he became disenchanted when he found that union rules prevented him from using his local workforce in other counties as his business expanded. He was required to hire workers from local union halls, workers he didn't know and whose skills might not have been as good as his own workforce. Eventually, he said, he abandoned his closed shop policy and began using non-union labor. ■