



STAFF REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

DATE: Regular Meeting of October 16, 2017

TO: The Chairperson and Members of the Planning Commission

SUBMITTED BY: Holly Smyth, Planning Director
Robert Reber, Adjunct Planner
Peter Winch, Senior Planner - WRT

SUBJECT: Revised Conceptual Planned Development Plan for the Hillcrest Project by applicant Santa Clara Valley Housing Group

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

- a. Introduction of applicant: Santa Clara Valley Housing Group;
- b. Presentation of revised Conceptual Planned Development Plan for Hillcrest;
- c. Discussion of Planning Commission's thoughts on General Plan consistency, zoning purposes, housing objectives, design features, overall layout, circulation, community impacts, potential future uses, and other issues and general questions related to the project;
- d. Public comment.

DISCUSSION:

On June 5, the Planning Commission initiated informal consideration of a proposal by Santa Clara Valley Housing Group (SCVHG) for development on the "Hill Town" site. On June 19, the Planning Commission convened for a second, informal session on the proposed project. This session included a short discussion at City Hall followed by a visit to the site led by the Applicant and a tour of Hercules neighborhoods led by Planning Commissioners and City Staff. Staff and Commissioners provided direction to the Applicant, with the goal of more successfully achieving the policy objectives of the General Plan and zoning as they pertain to the site.

On September 28, SCVHG submitted a revised application. This report describes the proposed project and how the proposal has been changed and summarizes previous Planning Commission guidance and comments regarding key issues.

Proposed Project / Changes from Prior Submittal: The new proposal differs from the previous proposal as follows:

Upper (Northern) Portion

- The submittal shows a small park at the northwest corner of the property where the entrance road meets San Pablo Avenue. This site was previously shown with four residential units. As

a result, the total unit count is lower by four units, and park acreage has increased from 0.21 acres to 0.75 acres.

- The entrance road is now shown with a 48-foot right-of-way, including a median and (presumably) a separate outbound right-turn-only lane onto northbound San Pablo Avenue.
- A new midblock paseo is shown in the interior of the subdivision, within the ‘B’ loop.
- The ‘B’ loop, ‘D’ lane, and ‘E’ lane are reduced from 26 feet to 21 feet in width.
- A “Paved Pedestrian Access Trail” is now labeled along the abandoned roadway connecting the northern and southern portions of the site, but the plans do not show any improvements related to that trail.
- Proposed architectural styles have been changed. The new styles are identified as “Italianate,” “Tuscan,” and “Palazzo.”
- As in the previous submittal, three plans are provided (one in each style) for alley-loaded houses, and three plans are provided (in two of the three styles) for front-loaded houses. As before, all alley-loaded house plans are three stories, and all front-loaded house plans are two stories. Floor plans appear very similar to the previous set of plans, even though the exterior styles have changed.
- Areas of “stamped, colored asphalt” have been indicated on the Illustrative Site Plan.
- Two illustrative sections have been added to show the relationship between houses and streets within the subdivision.

Lower (Southern) Portion

- The submittal shows two alternative concepts for future development on a pad created on the southern portion of the property:
 - “Alternative A—Hotel and Housing” would include: a 120-room hotel in a 5-story building; a 126-unit, 4-story residential building; and a total of 383 parking spaces serving these uses.
 - “Alternative B—Retail and Housing” would include 20,000 square feet of retail space in a single-story building; 96 residential units in four 3-story buildings; and 262 parking spaces serving these uses.
- The revised submittal shows:
 - Simple building massing on an elevation model.
 - Potential building and parking lot footprints, a new access roadway, and a new emergency vehicle access. The roadways would connect San Pablo Avenue to the lower development pad. Diagrams do not indicate any connection between the two portions of the site, or between the proposed building forms and their surroundings.

Summary of Previous Planning Commission Comments

Topography

In previous meetings, Planning Commissioners appreciated the way the proposed project was designed to limit the need for site grading. A desire was expressed to better understand the topography along the site’s northern edge.

Land Use

Some Commissioners wished to see a greater mix of housing types. Suggestions included multifamily along San Pablo Avenue, or clusters of duplexes and triplexes throughout the upper portion of the site. Staff noted that the General Plan and zoning envision an integrated mixture of uses at the site, which the prior project plans did not represent.

Future Development and the Relationship between Upper and Lower Portions of the Site

Commissioners saw that the proposed residential development on the upper portion of the site and the future development on the lower portion would have little connection. SCVHG representatives stated that the emergency vehicle access road (EVA) shown on the prior plans was meant to also function as a pedestrian path which could also extend to the lower portion of the site, but this connection was not shown on the plans.

Commissioners were not comfortable with the lack of information about future development on the lower portion of the site and requested diagrams showing how potential future buildings would look in relation to the site topography.

Access; Relationship to the Larger Community

Staff felt that the single access road may not be adequate; SCVGH representatives said they would like to go over this issue with Fire District personnel. One Commissioner pointed out that the access road would have only one lane in each direction, and that exiting traffic would likely back up.

There was discussion of potential pedestrian improvements to connect residents of the new neighborhood to other parts of Hercules. These should include new pedestrian crossings of San Pablo Avenue at Linus Pauling Drive, and could also include new sidewalks and/or crossings along San Pablo Avenue adjacent to the site.

Views and Visibility

Staff asked whether the site plan optimized views to the bay. During the site visit, Commissioners discussed the opportunity to orient development and public spaces toward Mt. Tam. The WRT concept showed how a linear park could open out to views of the bay.

Parks and Open Space

Commissioners felt that the very small proposed park would not be sufficient to meet the needs of future residents in terms of area or amenities. One Commissioner proposed the site adjacent to San Pablo Avenue as a potential park location; others noted the value of amenities for older children, teens, and adults. A concept sketch provided by WRT showed the possibility for a central park spine, similar to the linear parkways in the nearby Victoria by the Bay neighborhood.

Commissioners wanted to see more open space usable for recreation. Specific ideas included exercise stations and a “nature path” to the cell phone tower hill. The WRT concept sketch showed a system of pedestrian routes linking parks, open spaces, and developed portions of the site.

Vegetation and Landscaping

One Commissioner said that the Callery pear trees should be removed from the proposed plant palette. Another suggested that the Applicant work with an arborist to understand what would grow well in the open space areas. Particular interest was shown in landscaping that would be visible from the freeway, similar to the Foxboro subdivision north-east of the junction of Interstate 80 and Highway 4. Staff observed that the current submittal does not show existing trees such as mature native oaks or how they could be integrated into future development.

Architecture and Design

One Commissioner was concerned about single-family units facing each other in such close proximity, and another questioned the way 3-story houses would affect adjacent paseos. One Commissioner was concerned about the lack of driveways, and potential conflicts over on-street parking. One Commissioner wished to see greater variety in building forms at a fundamental level, not just “different things pasted onto the same box,” and also wished to see a greater variety in floor plans to meet the needs to accommodate diverse households.

Future Review and Approvals: As currently presented, the project would need the following discretionary approvals from the City Council (presuming the applicant opts to follow standard provisions of the Zoning Ordinance rather than the *Central Hercules Regulating Code*):

- ***Initial and/or Final Planned Development Plan (PDP)***
 - As required by Section 48.200 of the City’s zoning ordinance.
- ***Design Review Permit***
 - The project must follow the Design Review process and findings outlined in Chapter 42 of the Zoning Ordinance. Design review would include the full review of building elevations, site plan, and landscape plans, in conformity with City plans and requirements.
- ***Vesting Tentative Tract Map***
 - A subdivision of 137 individual residential lots and remainder commercial pad and open space and cell tower parcels.
- ***Conditional Use Permits***
(per requirements within Planned Commercial–Residential zones; Chapter 15 of the Zoning Ordinance):
 - Hotel;
 - Retail >2,000 square feet.
- ***Master Sign Program***
 - As required by Section 34.400.R of the City’s zoning ordinance.

Because the Conceptual PDP involves no formal or binding actions, the Conceptual PDP does not require review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Nonetheless, the discretionary entitlement approvals listed above needed to construct the project would be subject to CEQA review and clearance. Staff anticipates the required CEQA review will involve either an addendum to the Hercules Updated 2009 Redevelopment Plan Environmental Impact Report (that included SCVHG’s previously approved Initial Planned Development Plan for 640 multi-family dwelling units and 4,000 sq. ft. of retail on the site) or a Mitigated Negative Declaration.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Preliminary Development Plans – revised (9-27-2017)
2. Staff report from June 5, 2017, Planning Commission meeting
3. Staff report from June 19, 2017, Planning Commission meeting