

94.6

Sebastopol wrestles with Palm Terrace development

Housing project next to Laguna

By CLARK MASON
Staff Writer

SEBASTOPOL — Palm Terrace, a proposed housing development with a long and complicated history, has been redrawn and goes before the City Council tonight.

Initially proposed in 1981 on a site next to the environmentally sensitive Laguna de Santa Rosa, the project has been revised a half-dozen times and was even halted temporarily by a lawsuit filed by opponents in 1988.

Now Yolanda Ghilotti wants to build 19 single-family homes and six granny units on the 7-acre parcel.

Her project was narrowly rejected by the Planning Commission last month on a 4-3 vote.

Planning Director Richard Spittler said the impact Palm Terrace will have on the Laguna is still the primary issue. The Laguna is a seasonal wetland on the city's eastern border that serves as habitat for a wide range of animals.

Opponents believe Palm Terrace proposes too many homes near the Laguna and the project does not provide any affordable housing. Spittler estimates the homes will sell for \$300,000 and more.

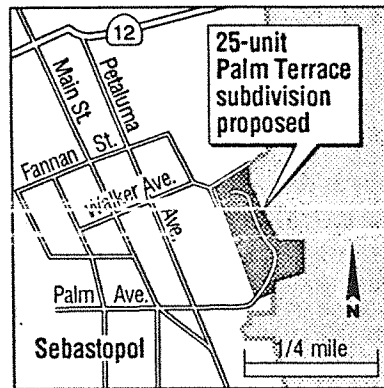
But Charles Evans, a developer and former Santa Rosa planning commissioner now representing Ghilotti, said critics cannot have things both ways — less density and more affordable housing at the same time.

"It seems mutually exclusive to talk less and less density and more and more affordable," he said, adding the six granny units will have a ready market, with rents estimated to be between \$500 and \$550 a month.

With Palm Drive Hospital abutting the property, the six small units could be rented out to nurses or other hospital staff members, he said.

Evans said the current proposal for Palm Terrace is on the low end of density allowed. The land is zoned for a mix of medium and high density homes in the current general plan, which in theory allows a maximum of 78 units.

Previous versions of Palm Terrace have proposed as many as 80 units, with the next-to-last version calling for 29 homes and some



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offices.

In 1988, the City Council approved that version, but environmentalists obtained a court order nullifying it. A judge instead ordered the developer to prepare

extensive environmental studies before Palm Terrace could be reconsidered.

Evans said the current plan for Palm Terrace takes into account the concerns of environmentalists in a variety of ways, including planting of native species of plants with a high wildlife value and dedication of a walking path and preserve totalling 1.8 acres next to the Laguna.

Other concerns mentioned in environmental studies include extra traffic the subdivision will generate at the intersection of Palm and Petaluma avenues, as well as the proximity of the hospital helipad and potential problems created by the helicopter noise.

Tonight's public hearing will be at 7 at the Veterans Memorial Auditorium on High Street.

94.7 Continued

Yankee stadium."

Applicant Ghilotti wants to build 19 single-family, two-story homes and six granny units on the 7-acre parcel.

Another criticism has been that Palm Terrace does not provide affordable housing.

Evans said asking for Palm Terrace to provide affordable housing and have low density at the same time is unrealistic.

Evans said he is uncertain what the homes would sell for, but did not dispute city planning director Richard Spittler's contention that it would be \$300,000 and more.

Evans believes the six granny units of 450 to 550 square feet would have rented for around of \$500 to \$650.

In 1988, the City Council approved 29 homes and some offices on the parcel, but that was blocked by environmentalists who convinced a judge to halt it until detailed environmental studies were conducted.

Environmental consultants now say the impacts Palm Terrace will have on the Laguna can be minimized. For example engineered erosion-control plans can be put in place during construction to keep sediment from going into the wetlands.

A basin would be built to prevent run-off of sediments and pollutants into the Laguna.

94.7

Sebastopol rejects plan for Palm Terrace development

Land near Laguna de Santa Rosa

By CLARK MASON
Staff Writer

SEBASTOPOL — Palm Terrace, a 25-unit housing development proposed next to the ecologically sensitive Laguna de Santa Rosa, was rejected Tuesday by the City Council in a 4-1 vote.

The project, which has been on the drawing board for 13 years and been through a half-dozen revisions,

was turned down late Thursday night after more than three hours of testimony before the council.

Many speakers told the council the 7 acres should not be developed at all.

One council member, Lynn Hamilton, agreed, suggesting that sources of funding be sought to buy the land and keep it in permanent open space.

Charles Evans, the consultant representing property owner Yolanda Ghilotti, said "I wish it was open space," but the land has been zoned for more than a decade for

high- and medium-density housing and his client has made a sizeable investment based on the designation in the city's general plan.

The only support for Palm Terrace as currently proposed came from Councilman Ken Foley, but his colleagues all had problems with the number of homes that would be built.

Mayor Anne Magnie said the developer's idea to dedicate a public path that would be part of 1.8 acres of open space in the project is analagous to clear-cutting a forest, then putting in a path to have

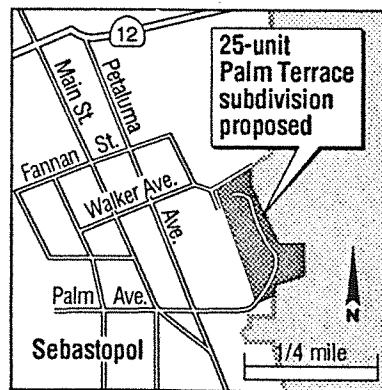
people come and view the stumps.

Members of the public spoke passionately about the Laguna as a haven for wildlife and a natural treasure.

"This is the last of something," said one speaker, David Bacigalupi of Sebastopol, explaining it is the last piece of "upland" grassland habitat in the city where Laguna wildlife seeks refuge during flooding.

He suggested it is valuable like "the last bald eagle, the last Van Gogh painting, the last game at

See Palm, Page B2



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