

# Shape Our Fremont

## **Residents Unite to Stop Three Housing Proposals**

Over the past year, several groups of Fremont residents have gotten together to stop three big housing proposals. In each case, the fact that the residents took the time to be involved in the decision process made a difference.

The first proposal was Golden Pines, which wanted to build 182 residential units on the site of a former sand quarry adjacent to Interstate 680 in the Mission San Jose Community Plan Area. A group of homeowners in the nearby neighborhoods pointed out that the only access to the proposed project would be on Sabercat Road to the intersection of Durham/Auto Mall Parkway, which was already heavily congested. The group was well organized, and individual speakers covered different aspects of the problem. The group also provided everyone with a colored sticker to wear at the Planning Commission and City Council meetings as a visible sign of their opposition. Faced with such a high level of resident resistance, the developer withdrew the proposal before the City Council could hear it.

The second proposal was Oakmont of Fremont, which proposed to tear down several auto repair shops in the Centerville Community Plan Area and replace them with a single building to provide 100 for-profit senior assisted-living units. A group of shop operators from the area told the City Council that some of them had been in business for over twenty years, there were several other small auto-related shops nearby that had also been in business for many years, and there was nowhere else in Fremont they could move. The council agreed that displacing successful small businesses was not in the best interests of the City and they declined to consider the proposal.

The third, and largest, proposal was Ohlone College's plan to build 275 rental residential units and about 6,500 square feet of commercial space along the front of the college's campus in the Mission San Jose Community Plan Area. This housing project generated a great deal of opposition from the surrounding community from the start, and the opposition grew steadily as details of the proposal unfolded over the following years. Residents established a website to keep people informed, placed banners along Mission Boulevard, and encouraged their neighbors to send emails to the city staff with comments and concerns. Because of the sustained opposition generated by these efforts, Ohlone College withdrew their proposal before it could be scheduled for final presentation to the Planning Commission or City Council.

### **Value of Involvement**

One of the reasons residents were successful was that all three development proposals required General Plan Amendments to change the land use designations of the properties. That's a serious step, and the City does not grant such changes lightly -- especially if the proposals do not have the support of the community. An equally important reason was that in each case, the residents were positive, prepared, and persistent in their efforts to oppose these developments.

For the most sustained efforts, residents first got together in small "core" groups to discuss possible approaches and research the strongest arguments against a specific development. Some approaches were discarded, and new ones were discovered. Other residents joined the groups and contributed their thoughts and information. Once the groups agreed on the best approach, they reached out to other people to share their thoughts and encourage everyone to send comments and concerns about the development to the assigned staff planner. The groups used social media, emails, flyers, and good old shoe leather to spread the word. Walking door-to-door and talking with neighbors was a good method because it drew more people into the process and let them ask questions and express additional viewpoints.

When the date for the first City meeting on a development was announced, organizers spread the word and asked for everyone to turn out -- even if they weren't going to speak. Those that did speak were informed and persuasive in presenting their arguments. Some read from speeches they had written, while others simply spoke from notes or without written aids. No matter how they were presented, the most effective speeches were ones that reflected the speaker's own thoughts and feelings.

In the end, the success of all these efforts showed that the views of Fremont residents are just as valid as those of the city staff, elected officials, and developers. Sometimes, all it takes is for the residents to get involved.

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**[www.ShapeOurFremont.com](http://www.ShapeOurFremont.com)** has pages on proposed **Developments**, the development application **Process**, the **Issues**, city **Contacts**, and city **Meetings**.