

Shape Our Fremont

Where Fremont residents can learn about shaping proposed housing developments...

Walnut Residences Will Face Opposition at Thursday's Planning Commission



FROM THIS



TO THIS

The Walnut Residences proposal to build 670 luxury apartments in a massive building complex at the corner of Walnut Avenue and Guardino Drive will go to the Fremont Planning Commission on Thursday, July 14. So will the project's opponents.

Neighbors are getting ready to present their opposition at the meeting. They say that despite voicing their concerns in letters and at three community meetings, the project still doesn't fit with the surrounding neighborhoods. Many other Fremont residents agree. Here are several reasons why residents oppose this project:

Too Dense

The proposal to build 670 apartments results in a density of 53 dwelling units per net acre (du/ac). That will fill the entire property with high-rise buildings and it's far denser than the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

It's also denser than what is allowable under the current zoning, which was approved in 2004 and designates this parcel as a Planned District with a maximum density of 35 du/ac.

In order to build the Walnut Residences project, the developer is asking the City to overturn the current zoning and establish a new zoning that would require 50 to 70 du/ac on the basis that the property is within a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Overlay -- but it's not. The Fremont Municipal Code states that if a parcel has been designated as a Planned District prior to December 31, 2012, a Transit Oriented Development Overlay does not apply.

So, since the current zoning was approved by the City in 2004, and the Municipal Code prevents a TOD Overlay from being applied, the maximum density for this property could remain at 35 du/ac -- which many people say is just about right.

Too Tall

In a neighborhood of two- and three-story buildings, the long, solid mass of four-story buildings proposed for Walnut Residences conflicts with the surrounding properties. The developer has proposed to step down the ends of the buildings to three stories along Litchfield and on the west side, but the rest of the buildings, including all of those facing Walnut and Guardino, will be a full four stories.

And just behind the four-story apartment buildings will be five- or six-level parking garages. One of the garages will have a rooftop swimming pool surrounded by parapets reaching 65 feet high.

The City says the building heights are acceptable, but local residents disagree.

Too Close to the Street

The Community Character chapter of the Fremont General Plan has designated Walnut Avenue between the BART tracks and Mission Boulevard as a Landscape Corridor. That's a special roadway category that requires special treatment. In general, Landscape Corridors are supposed to have varied development pattern, wide medians and building setbacks, abundant trees and landscaping, and primarily low rise buildings.

Residents point out that many of the existing buildings along this stretch of Walnut have a variation in heights and placement on the lot with large setbacks from the street to comply with these requirements. They point out that the proposed Walnut Residences buildings form a long line of tall buildings positioned too close to the street and do not comply.

Not What We Need

The Walnut Residences development is designed to be a luxury apartment complex with all 670 units renting at, or above, the market rate. Fremont already has an overabundance of above-market-rate housing, and does not need any more to meet their housing goals -- now or in the next 10-15 years. This is clearly not how we should be using this property.

This development is also too far from grocery stores, restaurants, and other shops and services to encourage walking. It is over a half mile from the nearest grocery store, and over a mile from The Hub. As a result, much of the necessity travel will be by private motor vehicles -- thus negating the City's goal of reducing automobile exhaust emissions.

Affects All of Us

Whether you live across the street or across the town, the Walnut Residences project will affect all Fremont residents. Because of its size, it will impact traffic, parking, schools, and the community character of our entire town. To express your concerns about this project, the best way is to speak at the meeting.

Planning Commission Meeting
Thursday, July 14
7 p.m.
City Council Chambers
3300 Capitol Avenue