

Shape Our Fremont

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

Residents Oppose Walnut Guardino Development

At a Planning Commission Study Session on September 29, an estimated 200 residents filled the council chambers and overflowed into an adjacent room to hear the latest proposal for development of the property at Walnut Avenue and Guardino Drive. They did not like what they heard.

Still Not Right

Carmel Partners is proposing to build luxury apartments on 13.7 acres of land that had been one of the last working farms in Fremont. The property is in the City-Center Transit Oriented Development Overlay, and the city has given it an Urban land use designation with a density of 50.1 to 70.0 dwelling units per net acre. When the original plan for 882 units in four- and five-story buildings was presented at two community outreach meetings in June, it generated a great deal of opposition from residents, who expressed concerns about the density, height, traffic, parking, and other issues.

To address these concerns, the developer used the September Study Session to present four alternative strategies for developing the property. Each alternative had variations in density, building heights, building placement, parking, view corridors, and open space within the site.

The lowest density was for 670 apartments in four-story buildings at a density of 53 units per acre. The highest density was a modification of the original proposal for 882 apartments in a mix of three-, four-, and five-story buildings at a density of 70 units per acre. None of the alternatives included any level of affordable housing.

After a round of questions from the Planning Commissioners, the meeting was opened to public comments. About 30 people spoke, and each was given 2 minutes to express comments and views.

From the beginning it was obvious that residents felt the project still had many problems. One of the biggest was the inadequate parking on the site, which was only 1.5 to 1.6 parking spaces per unit, including parking for guests. In Transit Oriented Development areas, Fremont will not allow more than 1.75 parking spaces per unit. They restrict the number of parking spaces partly because they expect many residents to take public transportation to work, and partly because they want to discourage people from using private vehicles. Local residents said that this is an unrealistic approach and would simply force people to park on the surrounding streets.

Another concern was traffic. Several people pointed out that traffic on neighborhood streets to and from the BART station and nearby major thoroughfares was already a problem, and adding over a thousand vehicles would just make it worse. The city's plan to build the development first and then address any traffic problems later was not well received.

Several people also noted that the surrounding area was filled with one-, two-, and three-story homes, and that the size and scope of the proposed project was "overwhelmingly inconsistent with this neighborhood". One speaker announced that there were two petitions opposing the project, and that they had gathered over 3,000 signatures within a short period.

The Plan is Broken

As the evening wore on, the tone of the public comments shifted to a more general criticism of Fremont's overall development plan. People noted that we already have problems with traffic, schools, water, open space, and other issues that the city is not adequately handling. A plan to build more housing and add more residents without fixing those problems first is, as one resident put it, "legalized irresponsibility".

Several people suggested changing the General Plan; others stated Transit Oriented Development areas should not just be circles drawn on a map; still others noted the city should evaluate the cumulative impact of new developments and not just the impacts of individual projects. Many people said they were proud to live in Fremont and valued the unique characteristics of our city, but they felt the accelerated housing development in the past few years was threatening to destroy that uniqueness. "We are not the City of San Francisco," said one speaker, "We are Fremont!"

What's Next

The Planning Commission closed the meeting by replying to concerns expressed by the audience, as well as making suggestions to the developer for future direction on the project. Several commissioners felt the developer should voluntarily include a range of affordable housing units, although they could not legally require it. Some agreed that the density should be minimized and all agreed the parking spaces should be maximized.

As for the residents, they vowed to continue to oppose the development unless some really substantial changes are made.

A City Council Study Session on this project is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, November 3.

Residents are encouraged to direct comments and concerns about the Walnut Residences proposal to the assigned City Staff Project Planner Bill Roth at broth@fremont.gov

To learn more about planning issues and proposed housing developments in Fremont, go to [**www.ShapeOurFremont.com**](http://www.ShapeOurFremont.com)