

A special meeting of the San Anselmo Planning Commission was called to order on February 9, 1987 at 8:08 p.m. by Chairman McPeak in the Council Chamber.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Hayes, Manning, Zaharoff, Chairman McPeak

Commissioners Absent: Harle, Kroot

PUBLIC HEARINGS

GPA-1 - Sohner Court Partnership, fronting Mariposa and Ross Avenues, A/P Nos. 7-284-10, 7-284-21, 7-284-22, 7-284-23, 7-284-27, 7-284-37, 7-284-41, 7-284-43 and 7-284-47, General Plan amendment to change the land use designation from 6 to 12 units per acre to 12 to 20 units per acre, and the initial environmental review.

U-617 - Sohner Court Partnership, fronting Mariposa and Ross Avenues, A/P Nos. 7-284-27, 7-284-37, 7-284-41, 7-284-42 and 7-284-47, use permit to construct 23 residential condominium units, and the initial environmental review.

A-142 - Sohner Court Partnership, fronting Mariposa and Ross Avenues, A/P Nos. 7-284-27, 7-284-37, 7-284-41, 7-284-42 and 7-284-47, design review of 23 residential condominium units.

These applications were continued from the meeting of January 19, 1987, during which the Commission directed staff to report back on the unique characteristics of the properties included in the General Plan amendment application and the existing uses, densities and zoning of the subject properties as well as properties in the vicinity.

The applicant provided staff with a land use inventory of all properties west of San Anselmo Avenue that are currently classified Mixed Residential, predominantly single family, on the General Plan Land Use Map. Staff confirmed this information in the field and produced a diagram depicting the existing use and density of the properties west of San Anselmo Avenue, bordered by Bolinas Avenue, Woodland Avenue, Richmond Road and Jones Street. This study shows that the properties between Bolinas and Belle Avenues are predominantly single family, the properties between Belle and Mariposa Avenues are predominantly church, school and commercial, and the properties between Mariposa and Ross Avenues and petrel Ross and Woodland Avenues are predominantly multiple residential.

The density of lots between Mariposa and Ross Avenues with existing multiple unit construction, some of which are included in the General Plan amendment application, ranges from 11 units to 40+ units per acre. The density of the multiple residential properties between Ross and Woodland Avenues ranges from 33 to 41 units per acre. The area between Ross and Woodland Avenues is designated high density, 12 to 20 units per acre, while the area between Mariposa and Ross Avenues is currently designated medium density, 6 to 12 units per acre, in the General Plan. However, the majority of the lots in these two blocks developed with multiple residential units exceed their General Plan density designation.

Given the current type and density of development in the block between Mariposa and Ross Avenues, staff described this area as mixed residential, predominantly multiple.

Planning Consultant Roberto reported that unique features applicable to the properties included in the General Plan amendment were flat topography, proximity to the downtown and transit services, pedestrian access to the downtown, and existing high density multiple residential development.

Concerning the traffic generation information submitted by the applicant, Mr. Roberto reported that the proposed Sohner Court project would have a different peak hour traffic generation than the existing use. This type of development would generate more traffic, but would not necessarily create a greater impact.

Under the existing land use designation of 6 to 12 units per acre, the applicant would be allowed to construct up to 14 units on the 50,736 square foot Sohner parcel. If the General Plan amendment is approved, a density of up to 23 units would be allowed.

The Commission reviewed their changes on the environmental checklist submitted by staff and confirmed that items 3.i. and 13.b. were changed to "maybe" and that item 8 was changed to "yes."

Roland Mays, representing the Sohner Court partnership, estimated a 15% increase in traffic during the peak commute hours. He said there are now 26 cars leaving the Sohner Tree Service property between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. and returning between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. Mr. Mays noted that the existing densities on the properties included in the General Plan amendment application are already higher than what is currently allowed, since they were developed prior to adoption of the General Plan. The Sohner parcel is larger than the average size of the other parcels included in the application, he added.

John Colteaux, 55 Kensington, asked what the overall density for the area could be if the amendment is approved compared to the existing density. He said he anticipated the amendment would double the density.

Nancy Bennett, 405 San Francisco Boulevard, said she did not want the General Plan blown apart to please a few people, the traffic situation is horrible, the town is overpopulated, and the Town should stay within the limits already set by the General Plan that were formulated to alleviate problems such as traffic and overpopulation.

Barbara Tracy, 228 Crescent, expressed concern about what would happen to the five other parcels in the General Plan amendment application if the application is approved.

Jack Phillips, Sohner property owner, said they have known for quite some time that a base for a tree service company was not the highest potential use of the property. He wants the General Plan amendment to change the density designation so the property can be developed for its highest potential use and service the town in a more productive manner. Furthermore, the density increase would increase the property's full assessed value for the tax base from \$240,000 to \$4 million, thereby increasing tax revenues to the Town.

John Silvey, 50 Mariposa - which is adjacent to the Sohner property, said he was for a quality improvement on the Sohner parcel but he did not like the density of this project or the density of Marin County in general.

Mark Christiansen, co-owner of a San Anselmo commercial building, and former Ross Avenue resident, said he has seen a lot of growth in San Anselmo during his 63 years in Town. He has seen a lot of crude things done in Marin County, but with his limited knowledge of architectural work, he reviewed the Sohner plans and staff report and was convinced the project would be a great addition to Ross Avenue and the downtown.

Robert Epifanio, 83 The Alameda, expressed concern that the characteristics of the subject properties were similar to other properties in Town, notably in the downtown, and therefore approval of the proposed amendment could establish a precedent. Furthermore, the Town does not have the capability to compensate for the traffic generated by multiple residential projects such as the Sohner proposal. Although it has been said that this construction will help the tax base, the effects of overdevelopment will adversely affect the town. He said the development should be scaled down.

Jim Cowperthwaite, 141 Oak Avenue, said multiple residential may be a good use of the Sohner property, but the problem is with the proposed density. He questioned what the overall impact of the General Plan amendment would be on all the properties affected.

Mr. Roberto responded that excluding the Sohner property, a change to the General Plan Land Use category for the subject properties could result in an overall increase of 5 units over what is currently allowed under the 6 to 12 units per acre density category. Including the Sohner property, the subject properties' change to the high density category could result in a increase of 15 units over what is currently allowed.

Commission Comments

Commissioner Zaharoff said that residential use of the Sohner parcel is beneficial and desirable but she has a problem with the proposed density. She said she could not ignore what the General Plan states is the allowed density, or what actually currently exists on those properties, but to extrapolate the existing high density to the entire proposed amendment area would have an overall effect that is too dense.

Commissioner Hayes commented that a General Plan amendment may appear as a technicality but it is a statement of the community. He was uncomfortable with the notion that the Commission can tinker with it in small ways. He speculated that if the Commission were holding a hearing this evening on changes to the General Plan, there would be a larger audience in attendance. Furthermore, if the Commission moves toward making project specific General Plan modifications, the precedent set is unpredictable. He questioned whether the block between Mariposa and Ross Avenues should be predominantly single family with a few multiple residential units or vice versa. He concluded that if the Commission is going to review amendments to the General Plan, it should at least deal with the whole downtown area, not just a few properties.

Commissioner Manning said he thought a scaled-down development would be appropriate for this property and that he did not like taking a piecemeal approach to amendments to the General Plan.

Chairman McPeak commented the Commission was being asked to make a General Plan change for a specific area in town and a specific project. He noted that the characteristics of the subject properties reported by staff could apply to other areas in town and cautioned against setting a precedent to approve changes to the General Plan for a project. Chairman McPeak expressed concern about the increase in density the amendment could create, noting that it is already difficult to get around town due to traffic, they have discussed in the past impacts from other cities' General Plan on San Anselmo and this change could likewise affect other communities.

Mr. Mays responded that the first page of the San Anselmo General Plan noted that the policies of the General Plan should change with the times. He noted there was a lot of valid concern regarding the medium density multiple residential areas on the Land Use Map. However, most of the single family parcels are fully developed, and most of the downtown has built-out parcels. It does not make economic sense, he said, to demolish a single family residence to build two or three units on a medium density designated parcel.

Furthermore, the Ross and Mariposa Avenue area of the downtown is earmarked for inclusionary and infill housing in the Housing Element. The Town now has the opportunity to employ these and other policies of the General Plan to create low-market, affordable housing, Mr. Mays said. Under the present density range of 6 to 12 units per acre, a maximum of 14 units would be allowed on the Sohner parcel, which Mr. Mays said would probably mean only one inclusionary unit instead of the two proposed for the 23 unit development. To his knowledge there currently is only one inclusionary unit in town.

Creating inclusionary housing is a one-time opportunity, Mr. Mays said, and unless the church or a large commercial property converts to residential use, this is one of the few remaining opportunities to implement the goals of the General Plan on a good-sized piece of property.

Given the current diminishment of the downtown, this is an ideal location for the type of multiple residential housing proposed by Sohner, Mr. Mays said. All they are asking is the opportunity to go beyond the 14 unit maximum to which they currently are restricted under the General Plan, the applicant said. If the Commission's concerns were the number of stories or the building footprint, that could be discussed.

Furthermore, a 14 unit development on the Sohner parcel would be less dense than the existing average density for the neighborhood, he added.

Mr. Colteaux said there are other areas in town that would be affected by this General Plan change, notably the Sir Francis Drake High School and Sunny Hills Orphanage properties. If the Town does not stick to its density limits, it would send word throughout the town that if the General Plan gets in the way of a project, you simply amend it. He disagreed that it would not make sense to tear down single family homes to build multiple residential units.

Mr. Epifanio said Mr. Mays gave the impression that development of 23 units would revitalize the downtown but he disagreed that the downtown would turn around as a result of 23 new units. He said 14 units on the Sohner property was enough.

Ms. Bennett asked the Commission to deny the application, adding that residents of these unit would not be taking buses but driving cars.

Planning Consultant Roberto summarized the Commissioners' concerns as follows:

1. This application for a General Plan amendment is considered piecemeal and the Commission feels General Plan amendments should be looked at on a broader basis.
2. The existing intensity of development in the area is not a substantial reason to approve a higher density designation.
3. There are many other areas in town with characteristics similar to the properties in the General Plan amendment application. Therefore, approval of this application could result in changes to other areas and consequently changes to the character of the community.
4. Concerns were expressed about the affects of increased density on other communities.
5. The form of development which could occur as a result of this amendment would result in a scale of development inappropriate for the community.

M/S, Hayes-Manning, to deny GPA-1, Sohner Court Partnership, fronting Mariposa and Ross Avenues, A/P Nos. 7-284-10, 7-284-21, 7-284-22, 7-284-23, 7-284-27, 7-284-37, 7-284-41, 7-284-43 and 7-284-47, General Plan amendment to change the land use designation from 6 to 12 units per acre to 12 to 20 units per acre, on the following grounds:

1. In general, piecemeal amendments to the General Plan, which this application is, are undesirable.
2. The existing usage is not in itself sufficient grounds for a General Plan change.
3. The precedent set by this application, if approved, could result in unanticipated and undesirable changes elsewhere in the community.

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman McPeak announced there was a five day appeal period on this decision.

ADJOURNMENT

On motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Calamar
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