



## HOUSING COMMISSION MINUTES

Regular Meeting

October 5, 2005

5:30 p.m.

Administrative Building Conference Room, First Floor  
701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, CA 94025-3483

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### CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Louchheim called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. in the Administrative Building City Council Conference Room.

### ROLL CALL

**Housing Commission Members Present:** Carol Louchheim (Chair), Patricia Boyle, Anne Moser, Elza Keet, Jack O'Malley, Clarice O'Neal

**Housing Commission Member Absent:** Elizabeth Lasensky

**Staff Present:** Arlinda Heineck, Community Development Director; Megan Norwood, Management Analyst.

**A. PUBLIC COMMENT** – None.

**B. REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS** – Chair Louchheim proposed that the order of the agenda be rearranged to consider Item C2 before Item C1.

### C. BUSINESS ITEMS

1. Approval of August 31, 2005 Minutes.

M/S Boyle/O'Malley to approve the minutes of the August 31, 2005 meeting, 5-0-1 with Commissioner Keet abstaining.

2. Consideration of the BMR Proposal for 75 Willow Road

Elaine Breeze and Bob Shuttle of SummerHill Homes, project sponsor, explained that SummerHill Homes is a local developer located in Palo Alto that focuses on infill development projects. Ms. Breeze introduced the proposal to develop 33 single-family residences on the 4.5 acre site located at 75 Willow Road. Ms. Breeze commented that the existing trees are a significant feature of the site and that the development carefully works around many of the existing trees. She stated that the 33 residences include five BMR units, which is in excess of the 15 percent of total homes that is required under the City's BMR Ordinance. The BMR units include two three-bedroom and three four-bedroom residences. The two three-bedroom BMR units are attached units located on Lot 17. They are designated as Plan 5 with each unit containing 1,483 square feet. The four-bedroom BMR units are located on Lots 2, 9 and 12 and are designated as Plan 4 with each unit having 1,617 square feet. The development as a whole includes nine three-bedroom and

24 four-bedroom homes. She corrected a misstatement in the report, noting that there are no five-bedroom units in the project and that the error had been caused by a mislabeling of areas within the residence. She stated that SummerHill Homes would be providing front yard landscaping, that all units would have private rear yards, and that the BMR units would have tandem parking.

In response to a question by Commissioner Moser, Ms. Breeze said that the BMR units are smaller than the market-rate units but that the number of bedrooms is proportionate to the number of bedrooms in the market-rate units. She indicated that the design was based on the approved BMR units at the Vintage Oaks development. Commissioner Moser pointed out that the BMR Guidelines state that the BMR units must be the same size and style as the market-rate units. She said that the BMR units that are attached do not meet this requirement because all of the market-rate homes are detached units. Ms. Breeze responded that because the development has been designed to fit the site, all of the homes, including the market-rate homes, are of various widths and orientations, so the BMR units would not be anomalous. She further stated that the BMR units are architecturally integrated into the development, explaining that in response to neighborhood feedback SummerHill Homes had redesigned the project to be reminiscent of the architecture in the Linfield Oaks neighborhood with different widths of residences along the streets and different garage door styles. She acknowledged that Plan 4 was the narrowest of the plan designs. She further stated that SummerHill Homes had been successful in other cities building smaller residences and attached units.

Chair Louchheim recognized four members of the public who wished to address the Commission on the proposed project.

Don Brawner, Menlo Park resident, presented newspaper articles to explain that the county is shrinking in size, air quality is getting worse, traffic is increasing due to overdevelopment and that county office vacancy rates are falling indicating a need to address a growing office demand. He said that the population of the Bay Area is decreasing and that Menlo Park is already very dense with 32,000 people in six square miles. He said that the proposed development at 75 Willow Road does not blend into the Linfield Oaks neighborhood architecturally, in part because Linfield Oaks homes are mostly single-story and the proposed homes for 75 Willow Road are two-story. He also said that the proposed lots are substandard, with only two that could be considered standard, increasing the potential for noise problems between residences. He further said that the proposed development includes tandem parking and that people don't like tandem parking so will park on the street. He said that the development only includes one entrance and a narrow road making it difficult for BFI and the fire department to serve the project. Also heritage trees will be removed and there will be inadequate guest parking. He commented that there will be a major impact on the local schools, which won't have room for the added students. He encouraged the Housing Commission to oppose the development and said that a petition with more than 200 signatures had been submitted to the Planning Division.

Commissioner Keet responded to Mr. Brawner's comments by noting that the Housing Commission should be able to advise the Council on how much housing

the city needs but that the Housing Commission isn't in a position to do this. Commissioner Boyle stated that the City needs to update the Housing Element. Commissioner O'Neal said that she wants the city to grow, but not to overpopulate.

Vincent Bressler, Menlo Park resident who lives on East Creek Drive, asked the Commission to oppose the proposed development at 75 Willow Road. He said that residents don't want development "piece-mealed" and that what is needed is comprehensive planning for development. He further said that the proposed development violates zoning standards and that he is not convinced that the City has a jobs-to-housing imbalance. Commissioner Boyle asked Mr. Bressler what he would prefer to see at the site. Mr. Bressler responded that if the use there is residential it should look like the rest of the Linfield Oaks neighborhood with lower densities.

Joanne Goldberg, Menlo Park resident living on East Creek Drive, asked the Commission to oppose the proposed development at 75 Willow Road. She reiterated the need for a more comprehensive plan for development in the area. She also stated that the proposed site is not a good place for housing because there is too much traffic and an over-loaded sewer system. She said that the Superintendent of the Menlo Park School District is very concerned about this development. Also she said that the proposed site is a lovely parcel and that the building there is a great building. She stated that the proposed development is too dense and that people aren't interested in buying a home in such a dense development. She said that the proposed housing will not be affordable.

Ms. Breeze commented that reoccupancy of the commercial building at the site would have greater traffic impacts than the proposed 33 single-family homes.

Speaker (no name given) said that he agreed with the previous speakers and believes that the City should consider the future needs for office space.

Commissioner Moser asked about the heritage trees on the site. Ms. Breeze said that the majority of the heritage trees to be removed are eucalyptis trees. She added that the development would include adding new trees that are larger than required. Director Heineck said that the Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) will be considering the proposal as it relates to the trees.

Commissioner Keet stated that the architecture looked sad with flat roofs and too many vertical lines and that she found three things unacceptable. First, the BMR units are smaller than the market-rate units. Second, that the BMR units are located in a cluster in the development. Third, the façade of the attached units clearly indicates the attachment. She asked about the appliances and materials in the BMR units. Ms. Breeze directed the Commission to a list of features, noting that the appliances and materials in the BMR units will be different than those in the market-rate units but of good quality.

Commissioner Moser agreed with Commissioner Keet regarding the size of the individual units, the clustering of the units and that the appliances and materials are not the same as in the market rate units. She also expressed concern regarding the

comments made by neighbors. Commissioner Boyle said that the duplex style doesn't work because there are no similar market-rate residences. Commissioner O'Malley expressed concern over the significant difference in square footage between the BMR and market-rate units. Commissioner Keet asked what the City is doing about the "piece-meal" re-zoning brought up during the public comments portion of the meeting. Director Heineck responded that the City Council has directed staff to undertake a comprehensive traffic study for all projects in the area to understand the cumulative impacts of the proposed development and guide decision-making on the projects.

Commissioner Boyle inquired about the Housing Element. Director Heineck said that work on the Element has been prioritized for January 2006 dependent on the release of new housing needs numbers by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). Commissioner Keet asked why we have to follow the ABAG numbers for housing. The Director said that the State determines the number of housing units needed for each region of the State and directs the regional agency, in our case ABAG, to allocate the units to each jurisdiction on a "fair share" basis. She explained that meeting the required housing needs number is essential to receiving certification of the element from the State. She said it is important to have a State-certified housing element because it affects the City's eligibility for State funds/grants, can open up the City to possible litigation, and because there has been and will continue to be pending legislation that would penalize cities for not having certified housing elements. She explained that the City has an approved Housing Element from 1992 that was not certified by the State. She said that for the Housing Element being worked on now, the City is required by ABAG to plan for 982 housing units but that we are studying closer to 1,400 units to provide flexibility for the decision-makers when considering various housing sites. Commissioner Boyle asked when the City last updated our list of sites available for housing development. Director Heineck responded that this was done towards the end of 2004 or the beginning of 2005. She said that the December Housing Commission meeting will be a good time for the Commission to restate its position that the Housing Element should be a priority for City Council.

At the conclusion of the discussion, there was Commission consensus that there is a significant difference in the square footages of BMR units when compared to the market-rate units, that the duplex arrangement is an obvious difference from other units and can be easily distinguishable from the other units, and that the garage style of the BMR units is distinctly different than the market rate units. The Commission commented that it cannot support the attached unit design unless market rate units were of the same design. Chair Louchheim stated that the Commission will be looking for a proposal that is consistent with the BMR Guidelines, meaning the BMR units should be of similar size as the market rate units, spread throughout the development and indistinguishable from the exterior.

3. Monthly Report on the Housing Rehabilitation Loan Program for August 2005.

The Commissioners accepted the report.

**D. INFORMATION ITEMS**

1. Report on Green Building in the Netherlands by Elza Keet

Commissioner Keet gave a report on a housing conference that she attended in the Netherlands. She explained that in the Netherlands they have to reclaim land from the sea and are planning for high-density development. Space-age style architecture is popular there now. This architecture utilizes sunlight and green-building techniques. She said that at the conference they said that San Francisco is "doing everything wrong" and the Netherlands everything right. She said that traffic there is becoming a problem.

2. Housing Leadership Day, October 21, 2005.

Chair Louchheim and Patricia Boyle attended Housing Leadership Day on October 21, 2005.

**E. ADJOURNMENT** The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Megan Norwood  
Management Analyst