

Coastal commission finally makes way for senior housing

By MARY BROWNFIELD

AFTER YEARS of planning, fundraising and permit delays, the Carmel Foundation is on the verge of breaking ground on new affordable apartments for seniors. A major step forward quietly occurred in Monterey March 12, when the California Coastal Commission approved the city's new zoning and design rules for the 8,000-square-foot Dolores Street lot known as Trevvett Court.

"We were in and out of there in five minutes," commented foundation CEO Jill Sheffield.

The brief discussion and quick approval were based on the recommendation of coastal planner Mike Watson, who determined the "specific plan" proposed for the property would

not violate the city's Local Coastal Program or ruin the town's character.

Designed by architect Eric Miller, the project calls for two-story buildings containing 14 affordable apartments to replace nine units in one- and two-story buildings at Trevvett Court. It will also have some underground parking and common areas.

Watson concluded the plan would "facilitate a project that would be sited and designed to limit its perceived scale," and he described its allowances — increasing maximum floor area from 80 percent to 109 percent, coverage from 68 percent to 70 percent, and height from 26 feet to 30 feet — as "slightly" more than permitted under citywide rules. The plan would restrict the apartments to rental by older residents with low and very low incomes, and would also govern water quality and limit landscaping to noninvasive and native plants.

"The plan requires the use of traditional Carmel design elements and should enhance and foster the special community character of Carmel," he concluded.

Sigh of relief

His support marked a striking contrast to the tortured path of a citywide ordinance approved by the Carmel City Council in February 2007 to facilitate 100 percent low-cost hous-

ing projects in town. That law, designed to accommodate the Trevvett Court plan and others like it, sought to provide more flexibility in height, setbacks, density, floor area and parking for affordable-housing projects.

After months of apparently ignoring the proposed law, the commission requested multiple changes last summer, and the city agreed. In December, having concluded the zoning flexibility in the law would irreparably harm the town, Watson recommended approval only if all provisions except the density increase were removed, and the coastal commission OK'd the gutted ordinance.

Carmel planners then had little choice but to write a specific plan stating heights, setbacks and other standards only applicable to the Dolores street property, so the nonprofit could proceed with its project. The city council approved the plan, but since it was an amendment to the Local Coastal Program, the coastal commission had to approve it as well.

Last Thursday, it did, to Sheffield's immense relief.

"We were quite far down on the agenda, and I had planned to be there all day," she recalled. "I had some board members who were going to come down later, and they missed the whole thing!"

The state's OK paves the way for the city permits, which should go smoothly, considering planners already vetted the project and stated their support months ago.

"And then it's just a matter of getting enough money to build," Sheffield said.

The foundation wants to raise \$2.4 million before breaking ground and is about \$400,000 below that target. Sheffield said donations have been very generous — including the \$50,000 the California Association of Realtors gave the foundation on Jan. 21.

"We're completely finished with the coastal commission," she said. "And we're ready."



As soon as it raises another \$400,000 and gets its city permits, The Carmel Foundation will finally be able to break ground on 14 new apartments at Trevvett Court.