

City tries again to OK low-cost housing

By MARY BROWNFIELD

WITH THE California Coastal Commission staff's gutting of a Carmel ordinance meant to encourage 100 percent affordable housing projects, city planners and officials from the nonprofit Carmel Foundation met this week to figure out Plan B for the proposed low-cost senior housing project at Trevvett Court.

The ordinance, which languished with coastal commission staff for more than a year, was created to allow exceptions to zoning rules on height, setbacks, density and floor area for projects solely consisting of low-income housing. But coastal planners worried the new law might lead to projects that would ruin the town's character, so they recommended commission-

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ers only OK the ordinance, an amendment to the city's Local Coastal Program, if most of the zoning exceptions were removed. The city relented, and the commission approved the neutered ordinance last week, according to planning and building services manager Sean Conroy.

That meant planners had to find another way to accommodate The Carmel Foundation project, which calls for demolishing nine old units on the 8,000-square-foot Dolores Street property and replacing them with 14 new ones in a complex designed by architect Eric Miller. The city OK'd the plans in May 2007, contingent upon the coastal commission's approval of the ordinance that would have provided the necessary exceptions for height, setbacks, density and floor area.

At a special meeting Tuesday, Conroy told the planning commission and foundation representatives that the best means of moving the Trevvett project forward would be to create a "specific plan" with zoning requirements just for

that property.

"The concern that the coastal commission raised with the ordinance was that it would apply to any project" in the residential-commercial and multifamily-residential districts of the city, Conroy said.

According to his Dec. 16 report, the specific plan governing development at Trevvett Court would ensure the 14 affordable units for seniors would be consistent with "the unique village character of the city," incorporate traditional materials and details, be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood, maintain open space and outdoor areas for residents' use, and provide parking.

The proposed plan designates a maximum floor area of 8,700 square feet, a maximum density of 14 units (76 per acre), a maximum lot coverage of 5,600 square feet (70 percent), a 30-foot height limit and several setback requirements. It also calls for a drainage plan, a landscape plan, parking, assurance the units will remain affordable, and penalties for any violation of the specific plan. Its stipulations do not require a new design, according to Conroy.

He suggested the commission recommend the city coun-

cil rezone the property as a "community plan district" — which is necessary for the imposition of a specific plan — and approve the creation of the Trevvett Court Specific Plan. He also recommended the commission approve minor changes to the permits so they mesh with the specific plan, which must also be approved by the California Coastal Commission.

"It has been a year-and-a-half since the initial project was approved, and I encourage you to approve it again," commented Jill Sheffield, president and CEO of the foundation that serves members age 55 and older. No one else commented on the project, and without much further discussion, commissioners unanimously voted to recommend the council change the zoning and approve the specific plan. They also OK'd the changes Conroy recommended to ensure the permits are correct.

After chairman Bill Strid complimented Conroy on his report, commissioner Janet Reimers, who wasn't a member when the Trevvett Court design was approved, said, "I think the design is very attractive as well, and I compliment the architectural firm. I think it's very well done."

