

Council asked to ease rules for affordable housing downtown

By MARY BROWNFIELD

THE CITY council should approve a new law to provide flexibility in Carmel's zoning standards for 100 percent affordable housing projects downtown, according to the planning commission, which unanimously voted Sept. 13 to forward the ordinance to the council for adoption.

Planners suggested the change after the Carmel Foundation proposed rebuilding and expanding its senior apartments at Trevvett Court on Dolores Street. Current law allows extra floor area and density for developments that include some low-cost units, but

the code does not address projects that are exclusively affordable housing. Rather than create an individual plan with zoning exceptions for each low-income housing project, they proposed drafting a law to address all such projects that do not conform to current zoning standards.

"Since affordable housing is at such a premium in the city, this ordinance attempts to accommodate affordable housing projects to the extent possible," senior planner Sean Conroy wrote in his report to the commission.

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According to the proposed law, the planning commission could make exceptions for zoning standards on setbacks, height (not to exceed 30 feet or two stories), floor area ratio (up to 150 percent), building coverage, density (not to exceed 88 units per acre) and parking for developments serving low- and very-low-income tenants.

The flexibility would only apply to buildings in the commercial district bordered by Junipero and Monte Verde streets, and Third and Eighth avenues. Candidate projects must comprise at least three units, and those with more than five must also provide onsite laundry facilities and a community room at least 250 square feet in size.

And even if the relaxed rules are approved, the commission could not approve any application "detrimental to adjacent properties or injurious to health, safety or welfare," according to the draft ordinance.

The planning commission discussed the first iteration of the ordinance in July, rec-

ommended a few changes and considered it again in August. An environmental study concluded it would have no negative impacts, and no one from the public commented on the proposal or the study. Without much discussion, planning commissioners unanimously voted to forward the proposed law to the city council for approval.