
Senior housing project follows slow path of new city law

By MARY BROWNFIELD

THE NONPROFIT Carmel Foundation's plans to tear down nine affordable apartments and replace them with 14 new units on Dolores Street moved another step forward last week, though work can not begin until the project receives a final planning commission vote and the coastal commission approves a new city ordinance governing low-cost housing.

Pacific Grove architect Eric Miller designed the plans for Trevvett Court, which the foundation owns and uses to provide low-cost housing to some of its members, aged 55 and older. The Carmel Foundation receives no government funds and provides most of the affordable senior units in the city.

The nonprofit first pitched its proposal to the planning commission in February 2006, but the application was sidelined while the city contemplated a new ordinance allowing exceptions to setbacks, height limits and other zoning standards for downtown projects comprising 100 percent affordable housing. The Carmel City Council passed the new law last month.

Miller's plans call for replacing two existing buildings totaling 4,400 square feet with a two-story, U-shaped structure that would provide 14 units ranging from 444 square feet to 606 square feet, onsite laundry facilities and an underground parking garage accommodating six vehicles.

He described the architectural style as "vernacular" befitting Carmel, with slightly pitched roofs, shingle and board-and-batten siding, stone veneer around the bottom, and divided-light windows.

"Most of the people who will be in these buildings are elderly people, and we wanted to make sure they didn't have the appearance of institutional units," Miller said. "It will be the kind of place people love to come home to."

Using provisions of the hoped-for ordinance, the foundation requested exceptions to limits on height (30 feet instead of 24 feet), floor area (8,697 square feet instead of 7,600 square feet), density (77 units per acre instead of 44 units per acre) and front setback (2 feet instead of 7.5 feet).

See HOUSING page 29A

HOUSING

From page 3A

But the new ordinance also requires projects with five or more units to include a community room. Miller and Carmel Foundation CEO Jill Sheffield requested a waiver, since the foundation's complex across the street includes such a room available to residents of its three properties in town.

"It's in the ordinance, and we just approved the ordinance," protested commis-

sioner Alan Hewer.

Sheffield argued another one would likely go unused, just as Norton Court's 540-square-foot room, with fully equipped kitchen, usually does.

"Unfortunately, they don't use it today," Sheffield told the planning commission. "The reason we don't want another one is that it's wasted space that could have been used for seniors to live in."

Senior planner Sean Conroy suggested including access to the Norton Court community room in the list of project conditions.

Community room wasted space?

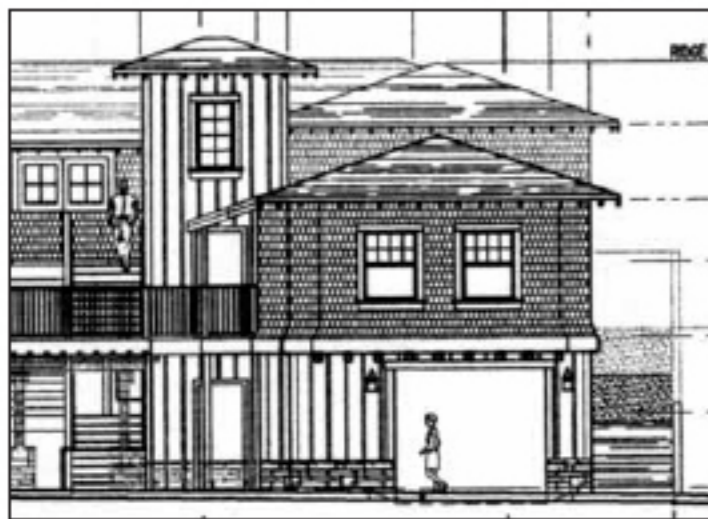
Commissioners reviewed the project's design in concept last July and requested several changes, including reducing the elevator's height, lowering the ceiling height, simplifying the design and materials, and ensuring consistent appearances and materials for all the windows.

Conroy said Miller's revised plans met most of those requests, and he advised the commission to OK the design with several conditions, including reducing the size of a decorative trellis at the front and wrapping the stone veneer around the south side of the building.

The nonprofit also requested about two-tenths of an acre-foot of water from the supply designated by the city council for affordable housing projects, and Conroy suggested the city grant the allocation.

The commissioners unanimously voted to approve the design. With chairman Bill Strid and commissioner Karen Sharp absent, how-

ever, the three members in attendance could not grant the use permit for the zoning exceptions, since it requires at least a four-person affirmative vote. Conroy said the use permit would be placed on a future agenda. The planning department could not say when the coastal commission will vote on the affordable-housing ordinance.



The Dolores Street elevation of the proposed senior housing project.