MINUTES
OF A REGULAR MEETING
OF THE
PITTSBURG PLANNING COMMISSION
March 10, 2009

A regular meeting of the Pittsburg Planning Commission was called to order by Chairperson Ramirez at 6:30 p.m. for Closed Session (Training). The Planning Commission meeting reconvened at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 10, 2009 in the Council Chamber, City Hall, 65 Civic Avenue, Pittsburg, California.

ROLL CALL:

Present: Commissioners Diokno, Fardella, Garcia, Kelley, Ohlson, Wegerbauer, Chairperson Ramirez

Absent: None

Staff: City Manager/Planning Commission Secretary Marc Grisham, City Engineer Joe Sbranti, Planning Manager Dana Hoggatt, Assistant Planner Leigha Schmidt, Senior Civil Engineer Alfredo Hurtado, and Administrative Assistant to Director Kathy Comtois

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Commissioner Kelley led the Pledge of Allegiance.

DELETIONS / WITHDRAWALS / CONTINUANCES:

There were no deletions, withdrawals or continuances.

COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE:

There were no comments from the audience.

PRESENTATIONS:

There were no presentations.
CONSENT:

1. Meeting Minutes, February 24, 2009

MOTION:

Motion by Commissioner Fardella to adopt the Consent Calendar, as shown. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kelley and carried by the following vote:

Ayes: Commissioners Fardella, Garcia, Kelley, Ohlson, Wegerbauer, Diokno
Noes: None
Abstain: Chairperson Ramirez
Absent: None

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

There were no public hearings.

COMMISSION CONSIDERATIONS:

Item 2: Siena Court Senior Apartments. AP-09-583 (DR).

A request by Meea Kang on behalf of Domus Development, LLC, requesting design review approval of plans to construct 111 senior-restricted, affordable residential units, and approximately 10,300 square feet of ground floor retail space along Railroad Avenue on a vacant 1.98-acre block encompassed by Railroad Avenue on the east, Black Diamond Street on the west, East Seventh Street on the north and East Eighth Street on the south, in the PD (Planned Development, Ordinance No. 05-1273) District. APN 085-164-017.

Assistant Planner Leigha Schmidt presented the staff report dated March 10, 2009. She recommended that the Planning Commission adopt Resolution No. 9790, approving AP-09-583 (DR), as conditioned.

Commissioner Diokno expressed his appreciation for the trash enclosures within the structure. He also complimented the staff-recommended conditions. He understood that when the project had originally been introduced during a public workshop, there was to have been public spaces in response to a need for such spaces in the downtown area. He asked if that had been part of the initial design or if it had come about through the public discussions.

Ms. Schmidt pointed out a courtyard public space plaza as shown in the plans attached to the staff report, that would be located on the southwestern corner of the site and that had already been a component of the plans.
Commissioner Ohlson spoke to Section 3. Decision, Design Review Conditions, Condition 10 of Resolution No. 9790 and asked for clarification from staff on the intent of the condition as it related to a required deed restriction against the property regarding parking accommodations. Staff advised that the applicant would clarify that issue, although the condition could be modified to provide greater flexibility.

Commissioner Wegerbauer commended staff on the recommended conditions of approval for the design. She inquired of the path of travel from the rear door of the commercial spaces to the trash enclosure and the path of travel for truck deliveries for the commercial spaces.

Ms. Schmidt identified a six-foot wide pathway/corridor that would be the path to the trash enclosure and that the project architect could further clarify.

Commissioner Kelley understood that there would be a limited number of parking spaces. She asked if certain areas could be designated for parking for seniors.

City Manager, Planning Secretary, Marc Grisham explained that the intent was for parking on the street as part of the Old Town strategy.

Commissioner Fardella commented that his grandmother resided in a senior facility located in the City of Antioch. Based on his experience, he did not see that parking would be an issue given the limited number of vehicles typically associated with senior residents. He noted that the Antioch facility’s parking lot was typically empty except for those vehicles associated with the staff and visitors of the residents.

Mr. Grisham noted that the staff-recommended 0.9 parking space per unit ratio was consistent with other senior projects that had been built in the City.

City Engineer Joe Sbranti, representing the Redevelopment Agency of the City of Pittsburg, co-owners of the property, supported the project and pointed out that the project would meet many of the City’s needs. He agreed with the staff-recommended conditions of approval and expressed the willingness to work with the applicant to ensure that those conditions were carried out. He also clarified, when asked, that Domus Development had abandoned the senior apartment development previously approved at the Cumberland and East Tenth Street site and had proposed a new development project at the subject location.

Ms. Schmidt clarified that the zoning of the Cumberland Street site remained High Density Residential.

Mr. Grisham also noted that there were no use restrictions for the Cumberland Street site and that high density residential development there could be market rate.
Commissioner Garcia stated that he had spoken with some local businesses that supplied building materials and that had not had the opportunity to bid on City projects. He expressed concern with the use of out-of-town contractors. He asked how local business would be able to bid. He understood that the City of Richmond had an ordinance for its redevelopment projects that required a specific percentage of contractors to be comprised of Richmond or Oakland workers.

Mr. Sbranti explained that the City encouraged local bids. He commented on the volume of materials used for the development of City Hall and stated that many of the materials had come from local businesses. The City's bidding process had been advertised well in advance on the Internet, bidder exchanges, the City's website, public meetings and postings at City Hall. Recently, contractors in the entire area were seeking public work. The City had received a large amount of interest in some of its projects. The bidding process had been very, very competitive. Due to the economy, the City sought the lowest bids. Staff continued to push for local bidders, although they had to compete in the bidding process. The subject project would be no different.

Mr. Sbranti commented that Domus Development had also built the Entrata development located at the corner of East Tenth Street and Railroad Avenue. He described Domus Development as very professional and competent. He supported a cooperative venture between the City and Domus Development.

Commissioner Garcia was not opposed to the subject developer but wanted to encourage the use of local businesses and materials.

Mr. Grisham suggested that the City could encourage the developer to ensure that their contractors contact local companies and solicit bids from local businesses.

Commissioner Fardella agreed that Domus Development was a great partner. He recognized they had a good track record. He noted that the senior housing facility would fill a housing need identified in the Housing Element. The development was also compatible with the existing surrounding buildings. He otherwise agreed with the staff determination that the project was exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

PROPOONENT:

MEEA KANG, President, Domus Development, LLC, 594 Howard Street, Suite 204, San Francisco, commended City staff on the work done in the City thus far. She emphasized that the building design could be built in the current economy since it was low income housing, with a continued investment in low income housing. The building had also been designed to capture Proposition 1C funding. The developer would submit an application to the State on April 1 for the use of infill funds, which would pay for the garage and Best Management Practices. She was pleased to bring the project forward.

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Ms. Kang emphasized that senior housing fit a need and provided safe and affordable homes. The project design also included green features such as a green roof that could be a potential landmark, and may assist in reducing costs to keep the project within budget. She added that Domus Development had worked with local bidders on the Entrata development, had local contractors involved in that project, and would work to ensure local advertising for bids from local businesses.

BOB LINDLEY, Principal Architect, YHLA Architects, Oakland/Davis, commented on his experience with senior development in the Sacramento region and the intent to broaden the amount of housing and services for seniors. He commended City staff on the preparation of the staff report, agreed with the staff recommendations, and advised that YHLA Architects and Domus Development would take steps to meet the comments staff had recommended on the design of the building, and particularly, the character of the mixed use building along Railroad Avenue. He described the mixed use building as highlighting the commercial ground floor along Railroad Avenue with the use of terra cotta tiles and a banding pattern on the base of the building. Corner towers with a radiating steel awning, evocative of old Paris metro stations, would be proposed, as would two awning treatments, a standard canvas awning in three different colors and a suspended steel cable awning with a steel covering or translucent glass material. The design would evolve over time and the building could be modified to suit tenants’ needs.

Prospective drawings were presented to the Commission with views of the project from Eighth Street and Railroad Avenue, and from Eighth Street and Black Diamond Street, including the main entrance to the larger four-story senior center across from the church setback with a public plaza. To the east would be the senior center with a different character from the main four-story building, and then farther east along Railroad Avenue the residential/commercial mixed use building. Another tier with a green roof had been added to the garage structure. The green roof would allow compliance with extensive stormwater treatment requirements and would take the entire parking area out of the stormwater requirement calculations while also keeping the parking area cool.

Mr. Lindley referred to a 78-unit infill development located in downtown Sacramento that had no parking but that had a public parking garage located nearby. That project was located in the downtown close to shops, where the benefits of the proximity to services and retail outweighed any parking issues. Another project that he had designed and that was located in the City of Oakland involved a 0.25 parking space per unit ratio, which he noted was working well. He was comfortable with the staff-recommended 0.9 parking ratio.

Mr. Lindley identified a space between the mixed-use building and the parking garage, noting that there would be a six-foot wide walkway there with landscaping. All of the doors from the rear of the retail would access the walkway with a striped access way out to the main drive into the parking garage. Trash pickup and delivery locations would have
adequate clearance for small vans or trucks, but would not be able to accommodate larger vehicles such as a garbage truck.

Commissioner Wegerbauer spoke to the path of travel and asked whether or not it would be shared or used as a service corridor for the retailers, to which Mr. Lindley noted that the mini plaza was to be used as an employee break area. The senior residents would have a large courtyard more suitable for their needs.

Commissioner Wegerbauer understood that the trash bins would have to be rolled out since the trucks could not access the parking area.

Mr. Lindley explained that the trash bins would be rolled out and had been discussed with the local disposal company. The trash enclosure would be wheelchair accessible. The area for deliveries would consist of a smooth finish, accessible path with less than a two percent cross slope from side-to-side and less than a five percent slope in the direction of travel.

Commissioner Wegerbauer liked the metal awnings along Railroad Avenue, although she asked the applicant to review the City’s guidelines for signage and noted that there could be the maximum opportunity for signage on the awnings. She expressed a desire to see the awnings be designed to accommodate signage, if possible. She understood that the awnings would be over the windows as opposed to over the entry doors.

Mr. Lindley requested flexibility with the retailer. He reported that all storefront doors would be all the way to the ground and could be altered. The awnings could also identify entrances but had not been shown that way on the floor plan. The six arched openings had recessed doors that complemented the building architecture and eliminated the need for an additional awning. At those recessed entries, signage could be located directly on the glass as depicted on the building elevations.

Commissioner Wegerbauer recognized that the arch offered opportunities. She asked whether or not the balconies over the arches fronting Railroad Avenue would be solid or could be seen through.

Ms. Schmidt explained that the proposed resolution would require balconies fronting Railroad Avenue to have solid walls or other sufficient visual screening for any storage that might occur on the balconies.

Commissioner Wegerbauer supported an opportunity to use the space that must be solid to provide a signage opportunity above the arch. She also requested the consideration of gooseneck lighting or some other lighting fixture to illuminate any signage.
Mr. Lindley advised that the plans had not yet reached the level of lighting detail and that those details would return to staff. There would be a separate application for a program for signage.

Commissioner Diokno liked the idea of the green roof. He asked if there would be an irrigation system on the top, and Mr. Lindley affirmed that a drip irrigation system would be provided underneath and be incorporated within the soil. While there would be access to the roof, it would not be for residents' use.

Commissioner Diokno also clarified with the Architect the trash enclosure locations and the use of trash shoots from above; one for trash and one for recycling per Sheet A-1.2. He referenced a hallway bridge over the ramp which he suggested added to the façade. He noted that the parking structure, with the exception of the one bridge to the southern wing of the building, had no access to the second floor to Building One. He suggested that access could easily be provided.

Mr. Lindley explained that Building One had a different floor plate due to the retail on the ground floor and where there would have to be a higher ceiling. The main building had living units on the first floor, and in order to make a transition from the second floor parking to the second floor of the retailing building, stairs or a ramp would have to be provided. He suggested it would be possible that a ramp could be considered for the southeast corner of the garage leading to the second floor.

Commissioner Diokno also asked to see the arches on the north elevation of the parking structure be repeated on the western and southern elevations.

Mr. Lindley noted that those design elements could be carried through.

Commissioner Diokno also spoke to the benches that flanked the main entrance and asked that they be repeated, with benches flanking the community room entrance. Mr. Lindley advised they could easily be provided.

Commissioner Fardella was impressed with the green and sustainable features of the design. As to the elevations on Railroad Avenue and the commercial development, he asked if the signage above the awnings would block the windows of the residences, as depicted on Page 1.1 of the plans.

Mr. Lindley clarified that the windows would not start until above the signage, which was below the windows. Nothing would be visible from inside the unit. He affirmed, when asked, that he was in agreement with the conditions of approval recommended by the City.

Commissioner Garcia asked of the intent of the two bedroom units, to which Ms. Kang explained that some of the units would have two bedrooms and two baths to
accommodate a roommate or a caretaker. Those options in the mix allowed flexibility as the senior population continued to age and evolve.

Chairperson Ramirez also clarified with Ms. Kang the intent of the three-bedroom management unit to provide flexibility and the location of the management unit over the senior center area, allowing “eyes on the street” across from the new school and adding another level of security. A separate manager’s office would also be located on the first level of the facility near the entrance.

Commissioner Wegerbauer commented that a projecting sign would be valuable, although there were few locations where a tenant could install a bracket to provide such signage. She asked the architect to consider placing less emphasis on the space over the awnings since those may not be storefront entrances and more design consideration should be given to areas around store entrances. As to the storefronts, she asked if there could be a way during the development process to have an opportunity for the tenants to customize the storefront. She requested a condition where they would acknowledge that such a request could be permitted as long as it complied with the Old Town guidelines.

Ms. Kang emphasized that they would be flexible and would work with whomever wanted to locate in Old Town.

Commissioner Diokno commented on the air space between the parking structure between Building One and asked if it would be possible to seal that off since it was a place for trash to collect.

Mr. Lindley explained that the actual separation would have to be determined. With two separate buildings, there would have to be different frequencies to comply with seismic requirements. Building codes would dictate the required separation. He commented that they could install a flexible expansion joint that could pull apart.

Commissioner Ohlson asked the applicant how Design Review Condition 10 would be enforced.

Ms. Kang explained that the parking would be monitored, and would be first-come first-served as the leasing was done. Most seniors would not have vehicles and increasing public transit use would be ideal. Identifying other alternatives, such as the use of shuttles, would allow flexibility with parking and a shared parking strategy would likely be needed. She added that flexibility with the deed restriction on the parking would be ideal.

Commissioner Ohlson requested that the language in Design Review Condition 10 be modified to allow greater flexibility.

Commissioner Kelley commended the design. She asked that, in light of the senior population, electrical outlets be placed higher on the walls rather than near the floor.
Mr. Lindley commented that there were strict guidelines on accessibility. All of the units in the building would be adaptable and five percent would start off being accessible. Adaptable units may not have grab bars installed in the bathrooms but would be set for such installation. The kitchens would be designed for wheelchair use. He explained that the reach for the electrical switches and outlets must meet prescribed heights and distances. He otherwise expressed his appreciation for the questions and comments on the design and for the Commission’s thorough review of the plans.

OPPONENTS: None
Commissioner Wegerbauer asked that an additional condition be added regarding the storefronts as follows:

- Storefronts could be customized by a tenant and the tenant’s design modification could be approved at the planning counter as a minor storefront modification as long as the tenant’s design request meets the Old Town Pittsburg design guidelines.

Ms. Schmidt affirmed that the condition could be added.

Commissioner Diokno suggested that the project fit into the neighborhood and was reflective of the neighborhood. He appreciated the attempt to create a public space at the entryway.

Commissioner Ohlson was very pleased to see that the block would be developed. He liked the development and was confident it would fit well. He expressed his hope that there would be no further roadblocks to development in the downtown.

Ms. Hoggatt recommended that Commissioner Wegerbauer’s recommended condition be modified to read:

- Storefronts could be customized by a tenant and the tenant’s design modification could be approved at the planning counter as a minor storefront modification as long as the tenant’s design request meets the Old Town Pittsburg design guidelines and the design changes were consistent with the rest of the building.

MOTION: AP-09-583 (DR)

Motion by Commissioner Fardella to adopt Resolution No. 9790, granting design review approval to construct a mixed use development containing 111 senior residential units and ground floor commercial development along Railroad Avenue between East Seventh and East Eighth Streets in Old Town Pittsburg for “Siena Court Senior Apartments. AP-
09-583, DR," as conditioned, with the modification to Design Review Condition 10 to allow
greater flexibility in the enforcement of parking limitations and with addition of a new
condition as follows:

- Storefronts could be customized by a tenant and the tenant’s design
  modification could be approved at the planning counter as a minor
  storefront modification as long as the tenant’s design request meets the
  Old Town Pittsburg design guidelines and the design changes are
  consistent with the rest of the building.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kelley and carried by the following vote:

Ayes: Commissioners Diokno, Fardella, Garcia, Kelley, Ohlson,
Wegerbauer, Ramirez
Noes: None
Abstain: None
Absent: None

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR REPORTS:

There were no Zoning Administrator Reports.

STAFF COMMUNICATIONS:

There were no staff communications.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Commissioner Ohlson reported that the TRANSPLAN Committee would meet on March
12.

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS’ COMMENTS:

Commissioner Ohlson inquired of the status of improvements for Al’s Snack Shop, to
which Mr. Grisham reported that at one time design changes had been proposed for the
site although nothing had been done. As to whether or not a bicycle lane could be
required in front of the building, he stated it would be difficult to make the nexus to require
a bicycle lane for such a small building and that such a requirement would be onerous.
As to the list of tentative projects, he added that the list could be revised to show the
current status of planning projects.
ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:23 p.m. to a Regular Meeting scheduled on March 24, 2009, in the City Council Chamber at 65 Civic Avenue, Pittsburg, CA.

MARC S. GRISHAM, AICP, Secretary
Pittsburg Planning Commission