

**CITY OF BELMONT**  
**PLANNING COMMISSION**

**SUMMARY MINUTES**

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 4, 2011, 7:00 PM**

Chair Reed called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. at One Twin Pines Lane, City Hall Council Chambers.

**1. ROLL CALL**

Commissioners Present: Reed, Mercer, Parsons, Horton, Wheeler, d'Souza,  
Commissioners Absent: Mayer

Staff Present: Community Development Director de Melo (CDD), Senior Planner DiDonato (SP), Interim City Attorney Kane (ICA), Recording Secretary Turning (RS), Contract Planner Knapp-Wollam (CP)

**2. AGENDA AMENDMENTS - None**

**3. COMMUNITY FORUM (Public Comments) - None**

**4. CONSENT CALENDAR**

**4A. Minutes of July 7, 2011**

**MOTION: By Commissioner Horton, seconded by Commissioner Parsons, to accept the Minutes of Tuesday, July 7, 2011, as presented. Motion passed 6/0/1 by a show of hands, with Commissioner Mayer absent.**

**5. PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

**5A. PUBLIC HEARING – Vacant Lot on Carlmont Drive (APN: 045-022-250)**

To consider a Design Review, Conditional Use Permit, Grading Plan, Tree Permit, Variance, and Tentative Map for the construction of ten condominiums on a vacant lot on Carlmont Drive (APN: 045-022-250). The project also includes a General Plan consistency determination for Vacation of a Public Utility Easement.

(Appl. No. 2010-0010)

APN: 045-022-250; Zoned: R-4 (Multi Family Residential)

CEQA Status: Mitigated Negative Declaration

APPLICANT: Frank Gonsalves

OWNER: Belmont Lot, LLC

PROJECT PLANNER: Damon DiDonato, (650) 637-2908

Chair Reed determined that no Commissioners present had any ex parte communications with anyone involved with this project.

Utilizing a Power Point presentation, SP DiDonato presented the Staff Report, along with CP Knapp of Knapp Consulting, who summarized the Environmental Review portion. CP Knapp noted that the City has complied with the legal mandates of CEQA and that no comments were received from neighbors during the environmental review period. She added that through the City's standard entitlement review process as outlined in Chapter 1 of the Initial Study, all of the measures required by law were used as a baseline for the review with only a few items added. SP DiDonato resumed review of the Staff Report, noting that the applicant has proposed a variance to the open space requirements of the Zoning Ordinance and to the fence/wall height combination requirements. He added that there are possibilities mentioned in the Staff Report to reduce the requested Variances through a reduction in intensity of the proposal. He noted that after publication of the Staff Report, Public Works indicated that a Hauling Permit would be required, and a memorandum suggesting modification to the grading permit finding and a new condition of approval had been placed on the dais. Staff believed that the required findings could be made and recommended adoption of the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration, that the Tentative Map is consistent with the General Plan and the Subdivision Ordinance, that the findings for approval of entitlements could be made in the affirmative, and that the Vacation of the Public Utility Easement is consistent with the General Plan.

Staff responded to Commissioner Mercer's questions as follows:

1. A demolition permit had been issued for removing the fill and breaking up the concrete in the pool area.
2. The references to damaged trees on page 2-6 of the Initial Study/Negative Declaration and in the Arborist's report will be clarified with the Arborist. CP Knapp added later that the reference to damaged trees on page 2-6 referred to grading that was done to get access to the site to fill the pool, and in doing so impacted the root systems of the trees along the Carlmont frontage. Those are the trees that would be removed as a result of the project; this is discussed further in a table in the Biology section, showing which ones will have to be removed and which ones would potentially be damaged.
3. Regarding the parking and the traffic study, the original report by the applicant's engineer was done in 2009, Crane Transportation Group subsequently reviewed that report and wanted to look at parking, the revised traffic study was dated December 2, 2010, the parking analysis was done as part of the revised study, and it was peer reviewed in January 2011.
4. According to standard practice, the Public Hearing notice was sent to owners within 300' – not to apartment dwellers.
5. Trash cans will need to be rolled out for pick up by Recology. Question as to how this will be accomplished was deferred to the applicant.

Commissioner Parsons noted that there were no counts of available parking spaces on Fridays and Saturday evenings, which he believes are the nights when there would be more cars parked in the area. SP DiDonato responded that peer reviewer Crane was aware of that and he concluded that someone might have to walk as much as 400' during the week to find a spot and on the weekend that might be extended to approximately 600'. Staff considers that to be about half the distance that is walkable; i.e., a quarter of a mile is walkable.

Commissioner d'Souza raised the following issues and questions:

- Why was the Level of Service (LOS) rated at F by CDD de Melo and Parks & Recreation Director Gervais at a meeting held at Carlmont High School six months previously, and in this report they show an LOS of C? CP Knapp responded that the original traffic study was not conducted during school hours and in order to clarify that, staff had required some revisions. She added that another issue is that both traffic engineers looked at this under ITE standards based on the peak period of 4-6 in the afternoon and 7-9 in the morning, and those operated at LOS C. Commissioner Horton pointed out that the 4-6 p.m. hours misses the hours that the three schools in the area are letting out.
- At the same hearing at Carlmont, part of the problem with the LOS F at the school was the input from the community followed by staff's recommendation that the bike lane be removed and replaced with a travel lane. There was impact to pedestrian movements because staff was recommending that one of the crosswalks be removed and there was impact to bus travel because the bus stop had to be moved down the street, essentially creating three crosswalks for pedestrians and increasing the danger level. He stated that he believed the traffic report did not take into account bicycles, pedestrians and busses as traffic and focused solely on automobiles on that street.

CDD de Melo clarified that the meeting referred at Carlmont was held in December of 2010 and it was held to solicit feedback from adjacent property owners, neighbors, and residents, relative to parking conditions along Alameda de las Pulgas. He did not recall an LOS F being indicated for the Alameda de las Pulgas/Carlmont intersection but concurred that the morning and afternoon schools hours can be a challenge. A number of long-term solutions were discussed at that meeting, including changes in signage and striping to the street, crosswalk improvements, and signage improvements in San Carlos. Commissioner D'Souza commented that he did not consider that those were improvements – they deteriorated the bicycle, pedestrian and bus environments – they were solutions to the traffic and automotive flow on that street. His point was that the traffic is stopped during the school period, so that adding even four vehicles in the morning and six in the evening to the stopped traffic is not an improvement to the situation.

- Commissioner d'Souza noted that the ITE standards have been widely disparaged, especially by Donald Shoup and no one has come forward to defend them. He commented that, in the literature, no one gives data on the parking spaces per unit related to what the automotive ownership is relative to the house size – there is data that states what the overall ownership is when you have large houses but there is no data that tells you if you have 750 one-bedroom apartments what the auto ownership would be, and yet the parking minimums here, which are based on the disparaged ITE standards, are asking for two parking spaces per unit. He added that this ends up being a significant portion of the cost in order to install the onerous demand. Chair Reed asked Commissioner d'Souza if he had a question. Commissioner d'Souza asked why the ITE standards were a component of this project.

CP Knapp responded to Commissioner d'Souza's comment as follows:

- 1) The ITE standard is the industry standard and is used nation-wide and by every city, every county, and every community. She added that she knows a lot of people disagree with different portions but that is the standard we have.
- 2) ITE standards were not used for parking – parking is a local issue, it has not been analyzed by CEQA for two years. As a service to the City, the City Zoning Ordinance, which requires two parking spaces per unit, was used. She suggested that the Commission

may want to discuss this policy with staff to determine how they want to address these issues going forward.

3) She did not disagree at all with the comment that during school hours there is traffic. It went back to ITE national standards; this was what was in the scope. She would be glad to expand the scope of they want to modify it.

4) She agreed with his comments regarding size of units and ITE, noting that ITE does not speak to trip generation – it just assigns for a single-family unit, regardless of the number of bedrooms, bathrooms, or size of the garage. Some local jurisdictions have said that even though ITE does not have a standard for that we would like to add a percentage increase to the traffic calculations or projections to try to address that. In this particular situation, it did not seem warranted because they are not talking about 4- and 5-bedroom units; they are talking about the lowest trip generator of traffic that you have on the books.

SP DiDonato added that, as CP Knapp noted, the applicant is proposing 20 parking spaces because our Zoning Ordinance requires 1 covered and 1 uncovered parking space per unit; they are meeting that Ordinance standard.

In terms of the p.m. traffic, SP DiDonato added that they realize that it was measured between 4 and 6 p.m. as a peak and that the school traffic is a few hours before that, but noted that it is not school traffic and worker traffic at the same time like the a.m. peak, which is much more onerous on the City's streets than the p.m. peak.

- Was there an affordability component brought forward and would it have come from the City or the applicant? SP DiDonato responded that this particular portion of the City does not have an inclusionary housing requirement and the applicant did not propose low-income housing as part of this project. He further explained that the RDA area of the City does have an inclusionary requirement when there are ten units or more.
- Is the Housing Element only related to the RDA? SP DiDonato responded that it is not. CDD de Melo added that when the project is in the RDA area the threshold is that any project 10 units or above needs to provide at least 15% of the units at an affordable level. He added that the Redevelopment boundary area is quite large but this clearly is not within that area.
- His question regarding bike parking was deferred to the applicant.
- Referring to a component in the Housing Element on traffic planning, does that relate to the whole City or just a certain area? Staff did not have the Housing Element available. CDD de Melo added that questions could be formulated for response at a later time.
- He sees people crossing on Ralston to the Safeway but not in the crosswalk. Is there a reason why the traffic study did not look at pedestrian movement on Ralston? SP DiDonato replied that it may be a bit too far afield from the project site. CP Knapp added that when looking at traffic and traffic impact, if you have an intersection that's operating at an LOS that's unacceptable, like an LOS F, then you look at that particular project as 2% more to than traffic stream. There are 3100 cars going through the Ralston/Alameda de las Pulgas intersection during the a.m. peak; this project would add four to that stream. That is significantly less than 2%. If the City wants to have the Public

Works Department take a look at the signalization and how it's working for people, that's another story, but it really is not on the shoulders of this project. SP DiDonato added that he believes the pedestrians are coming from Lyall Way or Carlmont Drive up higher and do not want to walk down to the light to cross the street. Commissioner D'Souza asked which route he would take from the subject project to Safeway. SP DiDonato responded that one could take either route – it's about half way in between – but that it would make more sense to walk down to Alameda and walk straight across where there is a light.

- Did you look at the impact of 200 cubic yard fill on the newly blacktopped Ralston? SP DiDonato responded that Ralston was resurfaced, not repaved, and that the Public Works Department did look at the project, they are requiring a hauling permit and they will be checking the roads and their condition before and after the project. He believes that there is a fee of \$1.62 per cubic yard plus a flat fee.

Responding to Chair Reed's request that staff indicate on the drawings where the 16' wall is that is the subject of the Variance request, SP DiDonato pointed to the left side of the project site as you are looking at it, noting that it would be a 10' retaining wall with a 6' fence on top of it. He passed around a 3D model, noting that it does not represent the currently proposed architecture but can be used to review the massing of the project. He added that the highest retaining wall associated with the project is 21' built into the slope at the back of the garage.

Chair Reed asked how a requirement to meet the open space standard requirement per unit would affect the project. SP DiDonato responded that if they were to receive a Variance for the fence height/retaining wall combination and it was just the open space, they would probably either push the units in so they can get a greater amount of open space at the back and would likely need to revise the design of the units a bit, and have less total area. They would shrink in order to squeeze them in and also get a reasonable distance for the court so that people can have access to the unit and have a little air space. That would probably get them closer to not needing a Variance – the requirements are no less than 10' in width by 20' in length – it's a difficult standard to adhere to.

Noting that trees #2 and #5 are in poor condition, Chair Reed asked if the City typically requires a fee for trees in poor condition. SP DiDonato responded that he believes the current ordinance does not differentiate between the conditions of a tree, unless it's dead.

Commissioner d'Souza asked if they could see the inputs that went into the Air Quality model that came up with the numbers for operating emissions estimates on page 312 on the environmental study. CP Knapp responded that that information is on file in the City Planning Office and is a matter of public record.

Frank Gonsalves, applicant, addressed the Commission, stating that numerous changes had been made to the application since they last met 2½ years previously. He wanted to describe some of the changes that they have made to the original concept and respond to some of the comments that Commissioners made at that time.

- Commissioner Mayer expressed concerns regarding the intensity of the units. His response is that all of the unit sizes of the application far exceed Belmont's allowable minimum sizes. Belmont's allowable minimum size for a one-bedroom unit is 600 square feet; the proposed smallest one-

bedroom unit is 765 square feet. The allowable minimum size for a two-bedroom unit is 780 square feet; the proposed smallest two-bedroom unit is 1,152 square feet.

- Commissioner Frautschi expressed concern regarding the density. This application not only complies with Belmont's density ordinance but when compared with the density of the adjacent properties the results are as follows: the density of the adjacent properties has a density of one unit per 1,000 square feet; this application proposes a density of one unit per 1,600 square feet, or a 60% density increase of open space.
- He had no responses to make on Commissioner Parsons' comments, as his comments appear to be "right on," especially his recommendation that a model be made, for it was this model that allowed him to better compose the relationship of the units and paralleling buildings.
- Commissioner Mercer expressed concerns regarding the court and its function. This court was designed to serve as a horizontal circulating element for the tenants' use as well as provide an open lounging area for the tenants containing a fountain, benches, street lamps and pavers, all within a fully landscaped area of 1,900 square feet. The court continues uphill, terminating into a large barbeque pit with benches, street lamps and pavers surrounded by existing Oak trees.
- Commissioner Horton thought the proposal may be more suitable to apartments rather than a condo. Her comments may be valid except the owners long ago decided to go for a common development and to concentrate their efforts towards selling units to first-time homebuyers at affordable prices. As recommended by Commissioner Horton, however, they added a washer and dryer to all the units in lieu of one laundromat that had originally been shown in the first scheme.
- He added an elevator to ease the tenants' vertical circulation path because it provided for ten private individual units, to maximize the amount of open space of 9,050 square feet, far exceeding the Ordinance requirements of 1,500 square feet.
- He changed the original architectural style because it was felt that the vivid colors would be unacceptable. He opted to change the style to the traditional motif that is now being reviewed.
- His past designs included a typical minimum Title 24 requirement. For this application 2½ years later he became a disciple of the Green Element movement. Some of the elements he included in this application are as follows:
  - High-efficiency lighting throughout will be installed throughout.
  - Energy Star refrigerators, dishwashers and clothes washers will be installed.
  - All interior trim, paint, carpeting, wood and resilient flooring and thermal insulation will be made of recycled materials.
  - He will minimize the building energy consumption to achieve a near-zero energy building. A white foam roof covering will be used to preserve heat loss or heat gain. Solar photo-phonic- roof panels will be used to conserve electrical energy.
  - If cost permits, a rainwater harvesting system will be installed to be used for irrigation purposes.
  - Water efficient water closets, faucets and shower heads will be installed.
  - A mechanical ventilation system to reduce moisture and indoor air pollution by providing fresh outdoor air will be installed.
  -

Mr. Gonsalves closed his presentation by stating that this project should benefit the local economy and employment status as approximately 25 workers are expected to be employed for 12-16 months.

Dave Rubin, landscape architect with Callander Associates, summarized the plans for landscape and irrigation design in detail.

Brahm Mozayeny civil engineer for the project, pointed out that the total footprint of the structure is about 9,000 square feet, of which 6,500 is parking space, and the density is about 1,500 square feet per unit, which in all the surrounding areas typically is between 1,000 and 1,100 square feet per unit. He summarized the geotechnical report and was available to answer questions.

Dr. Chavez, applicant, explained the changes that have been made since they submitted their preliminary plans, noting that they tried to design the project to meet the Belmont General Plan. He highlighted the following points:

- They are a total of 38' in height – could have gone to 50' but did not want to block anyone's view.
- They were able to keep a majority of the native trees intact – will lose a couple in the front for the parking lot but in the back all the native trees will be kept.
- The Traffic Report and the Traffic Safety Committee said the traffic and parking would be acceptable, confirming that on weekends the walking distance from parking could be half of the distance that is considered normal.
- He quoted several positive statements from the Staff Report regarding visual intensity, bulk, tranquil quality of the neighborhood and conformity to the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance in terms of proposed use, total floor area, parking and density.
- There will be nearly 40% open area, which is nearly three times as much open space as required.
- Regarding the 16' retaining wall, he quoted from a letter from a managing member of the ownership group of 1100 through 1114 Village Drive, stating that the group had reviewed the plans for the project and was pleased to recommend it for approval and look forward to the improvement to the neighborhood. The retaining wall will not affect the neighbor because it is next to his parking area.
- He commented that the project is designed for first-time homeowners or seniors who want to live where everything is taken care of for them. They need to have ten units in order to absorb the costs involved among ten owners rather than just six large owners.
- The 21' retaining wall at the rear of the building will not be visible from the outside – it is just holding the dirt back – the only retaining wall that anyone will see is the 16' wall mentioned earlier.
- He looks forward to the Commission's positive response to his application.

Responding to Commissioner d'Souza's question, Dr. Chavez stated that they did not consider an affordability component for the housing; they are trying to keep all ten units affordable.

Commissioner Wheeler commented as follows:

- She went to visit the site but could not gain access and would like to be able to walk the site. Dr. Chavez stated that it would not be an issue to make the site accessible.
- She questioned how the garbage will be removed due to the steepness of the driveway, as well as the size of the large trash bin, smaller recycle bins, and the lack of green waste or compost bins. Commissioner Mercer pointed out that the plans on Drawing A2 were drawn by Allied Waste before the City changed to Recology, which has new garbage collection standards. The applicant noted that there is adequate space to make any changes and they could contact the garbage company to bring it up to date.

- She question whether there are adequate spaces for bikes, and Commissioner d'Souza asked if they would consider putting hangars over the parking curves. Dr. Chavez stated that more spaces or hangers could be added.

Commissioner Horton raised the following points:

- She noted that the civil drawings show two inundation areas that are not accommodated with plantings on the landscape drawings. Mr. Rubin said they have not coordinated that area with the Civil as yet. Commissioner Horton stated that the Commission will need an update and something to take care of that drainage.
- Responding to her question as to what will be planted in the pots in the courtyard area between the two buildings, Mr. Rubin stated that they have a plant palate showing all low plants and that trees were not considered because of their weight. Commissioner Horton suggested that since it is a very thin, narrow, vertical space, something else vertical might help.
- Mr. Rubin responded to her question regarding landscaping on the patio areas that they had not considered anything for those areas; that perhaps residents could landscape them themselves.
- She asked if they were pursuing LEED certification. Mr. Chavez stated that they would do the best they can but some of the measures might be too costly. CDD de Melo added that staff can provide a checklist for compliance with LEED or CalGreen.
- She felt that the design of the railing at the ramp in front was unfortunate and suggested left pickets or maybe a horizontal rail. The applicant responded that the railings shown on the plan were from a CAD template.
- She commented that the white on the material board might be whiter than a Mediterranean color.

Responding to Commissioner Mercer's question about the function of the twin guard towers at the top of the front of the building, Mr. Chavez stated that they are considering whether to include a spiral staircase and loft in the towers, or they could have high ceilings in the rooms; a decision had not yet been made. Commissioner Mercer suggested the potential of having an articulated roof the full width of the building, something like Spanish-style dormers that would balance out the building instead of having emphasizing the already tall buildings. SP DiDonato added that modifications to the project would have to be evaluated by staff to determine if the space would be considered as floor area.

Responding to Commissioner d'Souza's question, Mr. Rubin said he would consider planting trees that are not on the County allergy list, such as a London Plane.

Chair Reed opened the Public Hearing. There were no additional speakers.

**MOTION: By Commissioner d'Souza, seconded by Commissioner Parsons, to close the Public Hearing. Motion passed 6/0/1 by a show of hands, with Commissioner Mayer absent.**

Commissioners commented as follows:

Commissioner Parsons:

- Could not make the findings for the Variance because of the high retaining walls and lack of private open space. He would want to see some green space without having to climb a steep hill to

get up to it. The back and side yards are totally inadequate for a personal residence. He felt there was no real attempt to mitigate the size of the property.

- He stated that some of the units are nicely designed, the one in the front is kind of an odd shape, the best room in the house is the bedroom upstairs, the living room doesn't have much wall space and the retaining wall across the back is pretty high. It could have been stepped up so it would not be a big high wall so the people in the front courtyard are looking at a wall. They have all concrete walls around them.
- It is bulky to the residents next door but may not be bulky from the street.
- Suggested turning some of the units 90 degrees from each other; for example, the back is wide enough to put four units with a walk-through between two of the units off to the back area and they could then have room for a much nicer back yard. Could probably do that with a couple units in the front and maybe have one or two units sited the way they are now.
- Trash is a major issue because of the steep ramp and their experience with Planet Granite.
- The retaining wall in the back looks to him to be 7' in some places and would need a railing on top of it. He could not make any retaining wall findings.
- He believes most families will have two cars, which leaves no room for guest parking. He went to the site two times that day and could not find more than two or three parking spaces within 600-700 feet. At 6:30 he found five or six with a few more down towards the Alameda.
- Safety of the high retaining walls is an issue.
- The rear end of the yard would not be accessible to handicapped people or seniors.
- He believed it would be a special privilege to grant a Variance to allow smaller private spaces and doubted if the units would be very marketable.
- He recommended that the Commission send the project back for re-work.

Commissioner d'Souza:

- Liked the overall project and its location, what it is trying to do with the infill, and the market it is trying to address.
- He believed most of the problems have to do with the City's planning code and how onerous the parking requirement is for this demographic and there is no data on it.
- He believed the young urban person who would want a first-time home in a location like this would not want to bother with a small amount of open space would tend to own fewer cars and be more urban about how they own those cars. For example, coming from a university setting that has City car share or zip rides and able to take advantage and know how to use those kinds of options and which, from a planning standpoint, are not available in Belmont.
- He thought it was a pity that they are losing trees, but there is no option in Belmont of being able to alter the floor area ratio. He hoped that one day the Downtown Plan will move forward and they will be able to talk about these things in a more realistic manner.
- He would like to see more access to the property in the front for seniors. He suggested that they could have a unit out front that was at street level with parking in back of it. He thought that one car per single bedroom unit would be a reasonable proposal to make to Council, and then they could move some of that space to the back in order to create a couple of accessible units. After Chair Reed reminded that there are four items before the Commission, Commissioner d'Souza stated that he could make all of the findings for all of the items.

Commissioner Wheeler:

- Had difficulty making the findings required for the Variance, particularly the outdoor space requirement.
- With regard to Finding c), wherein this project is compared to an apartment development nearby, she questioned how those apartments got to be the way they are in if they have a Variance. I.e., what privileges are enjoyed by the owners of the nearby properties and did they have to meet the outdoor space requirements?
- With regard to Finding d), she was concerned that this might be a special privilege that is inconsistent with the limitations on the other properties.
- Concerned that granting this Variance might set a precedent for future redevelopment in this area.

Commissioner Horton:

- Explained that as a first-time homebuyer herself her criteria was that she did not want to walk down an interior hallway, she wanted a door to the outside, a fireplace, a washer and dryer, and wanted it to feel as much like a house that she could afford, and that is what is proposed here. She felt bad about unit #6 and the lack of open space, but felt that perhaps someone would like that. Half of the yards are less than 120 square feet and half are at or far exceed that number, and there is open area in the back and a gathering area in the middle. She stated that she would rather see something like this than condos that look like apartments in an apartment building. She could make the finding for the Variance.
- She did not believe that the tall retaining wall that backs up to a very tall apartment building and looks onto its parking area is odd.
- She felt that there are some coordination issues between consultants.
- She felt that the building is too white
- The project meets the density – it's lower than the density that's allowed, the floor area ratio is lower, the height is significantly lower, and she believed the project offers something in this neighborhood that is an alternative to an apartment building.
- She could make the findings.

Commissioner Mercer:

- Since she was not able to get access to the site she did not feel she could do justice to any kind of judgment on this property.
- She did not want them to end up with a group of starter homes that have enormously high turnover because nobody really wants to live in them for very long and they're always on the market.
- She believed the grading is excessive and a reflection of a lack of creative thinking on how to deal with a hillside situation. There is additional height allowed here; she believed they could have conformed to the land better and got a better result. The proposal is to move 2,000 cubic yards to build 10,000 square feet; that's moving a cubic yard for every five square feet of living space. That is to her an excessive tradeoff that just does not have the cost/benefit ratio that she looked at.
- The wall height becomes a problem. She was not convinced that if they didn't step up the hillside property properly they couldn't somewhat mitigate those wall heights. She added that the residents are going to look out their window and see not just a very small yard space but the yard space of a wall.
- She could not make a finding to grant a Variance for more than the minimum square feet of private outdoor space, and believed the little courtyard would be such a tight space that it would feel like an alley. She was not sure how to remedy that.

- She believed that the City of Belmont made a conscious, deliberate policy statement that they want every home to share the wooded rustic nature of the community and not have some homes that don't have access to that.
- She felt that the intensity of development needs to be managed on the steep terrains and comparing this project to the surrounding buildings, which have a much higher intensity of use, isn't really quite fair because those buildings were built in the 1950's. Standards have changed and buildings are grandfathered in. Comparing this to the very high density next door is really not fair since planning and zoning and City vision statements have changed in the interim and we are now seeking a higher quality for each of our residents.
- She did not have a problem with the number of units but they need more creative thought about how to fit them in with the land; how to better orient them to the outdoors.

Chair Reed:

- Since this is an R4 district, he stated that if he were to propose a project here he would want to maximize his investment and would greatly increase the intensity on this site right up to the allowed limit. He therefore applauded the applicant for proposing something that is considerably less intense than what he could build.
- Since he was not able to see the site and had trouble visualizing it, he asked for the opportunity to visit before he could make the findings for the Variances and before he could vote on it.
- He stated that he really liked the concept, that there are some things they might want to change based on the feedback from the Commission, but he could not see any issue with the CEQA finding or the Vacation of the public utility easement.

Mr. Chavez offered to meet Commissioners at the site and could also arrange to have his consultants available, or, alternatively, if he knew what day(s) they were coming, would knock some boards down on the fence so that they could gain access at their convenience. CDD de Melo reminded that Commissioners would not want to be there as a group but as individuals, and agreed to coordinate the timing through his office.

**MOTION: By Chair Reed, seconded by Commissioner Parsons, to continue this item to a date uncertain to allow Commissioners the opportunity to see the property and for the applicant to consider some of the comments made by Commissioners about their inability to find for the Variance.**

**Ayes: Reed, Parsons, d'Souza, Wheeler, Horton, Mercer**  
**Noes: None**  
**Absent: Mayer**

**Motion passed 6/0**

Commissioner Parsons added that he believed that if the applicant reoriented some of the units, turn some of them across the back, he would find that he would have much more acceptable units and it might create a more interesting court and solve some of the Variance problems. He also reminded that they need to address the trash issue.

Commissioner Mercer asked that they receive clarification of the square footage in the towers and whether it would be a room. CDD de Melo stated that if the applicant wants to pursue the option of a room staff would evaluate it in accordance with code because it would be considered additional square footage.

Commissioner Mercer asked that Commissioners be able to reuse their packets rather than staff producing another full packet for the next hearing. It was agreed that Commissioners would take their packets home.

## **6. REPORTS, STUDIES AND UPDATES:**

CDD de Melo reported as follows:

### **6A. North Road Right-of-Way**

There is some construction work happening on North Road but not related to the Planet Granite dumpster issue. Associate Planner Walker, Chief Building Official Nolfi and Code Enforcement Officer Buckman have been in contact with the property owners of Planet Granite, who was sent a second letter. He believes the owner is amenable to dealing with it on a smaller cart level.

### **6B. Ralston/US-101 Landscape Project**

Received some information from the City of Redwood City about the components for the original landscape project and they are still grappling with budget. Staff has been made aware of a couple of new grant opportunities that have been forwarded to the Public Works Department and they are researching them for applicability for this site, which could mean that the project might have all the funding needed to get the original landscaping as proposed.

### **6C. Sixth & O'Neill – Street Reconstruction Project**

There have been modifications suggested based on on-site work. A bulb-out at the corner of Waltermire and Sixth might be taken out because of a concern with Recology vehicles making the turn without damaging landscaping. There may be a minor change order related to O'Neill Avenue as it transitions to the cul de sac.

Commissioner d'Souza pointed out that the sidewalk is higher than the lawns in a number of places in front of South-facing properties along O'Neill and that when it gets to the park entrance it creates a lip that is going to be a problem for wheelchairs. There is no ramp where there formerly was a ramp and no curb cut where there formerly was a curb cut.

Responding to Commissioner Horton's question about the dead trees at Emmett House, CDD de Melo stated that landscaping is managed by a property management firm that does all landscaping for City-owned properties and the two trees are going to be replaced. The two trees were flooded due to a timer that was set wrong.

### **6D. US-101 Pedestrian/Bike Bridge Project**

White high-gloss paint is being applied to give the bridge a nice sheen and the railing and fencing will be going up soon. Commissioner Mercer stated that Parks and Recreation Director Gervais had announced at a meeting the previous evening that the planned September 28<sup>th</sup> dedication ceremony has been postponed.

**6E. High-Speed Rail (HSR)**

The HSR Ad Hoc Committee had someone at most if not all of the seven locations in Belmont on National Night Out. Some of the areas had a couple hundred people. The next Ad Hoc Committee meeting will be in September.

Commissioner Mercer reported that the HSR website is undergoing a redesigned and includes a lot more information than previously. The committee is waiting for a study from CalTrain about whether it would be feasible to run HSR trains on a shared system with only two CalTrain tracks, or what she called 2.5 tracks, meaning a third track at some intervals for sidetracking so that the HSR trains can shoot through. The next meeting of HSR Authority is scheduled for August 25<sup>th</sup>. CDD de Melo added that staff and some members of the Ad Hoc Committee are drafting a letter in response to a mid-April press release by State representatives.

**Other Items**

Membership in the **Village Planning Committee** is now completed and will likely be convened at the end of August or early September.

The **Tree Ordinance** will again be on the City Council agenda for next Tuesday and the **Professional Services Agreement for the General Plan** is also on that agenda.

**Commissioner Mercer stated that she will not be at the August 16<sup>th</sup> Planning Commission meeting.**

**7. CITY COUNCIL MEETING OF TUESDAY, AUGUST 9, 2011 – 7:30 P.M.**

Liaison: Vice Chair Mercer  
Alternate Liaison: Chair Reed

**8. ADJOURNMENT:**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m. to a Regular Planning Commission Meeting on Tuesday, August 16, 2011, at 7:00 p.m. in Belmont City Hall.

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Carlos de Melo  
Planning Commission Secretary

*CD's of Planning Commission Meetings are available in the  
Community Development Department  
Please call (650) 595-7417 to schedule an appointment.*