

San Leandro Times

City Council OKs Project Near BART

By: Amy Sylvestri - March 4, 2009

The City Council unanimously approved Bridge Housing's plans for 100 affordable housing units near the San Leandro BART station at Monday night's meeting.

The approval is a major step forward for the controversial San Leandro Crossings housing project, which has been a hot topic at meetings for years, but came up for a vote for the first time this week.

The council gave the go-ahead for the construction of 100 affordable rate units on the property located at 1333 Martinez St.

The \$37.8-million building will be called "The Alameda" and will join the \$64 million 200-unit market-rate "Cornerstone" building across the street as the first stage of the Crossings housing that could eventually include up to 700 units at a total cost of \$216 million. The complete Transit Oriented Development housing plan could include up to 3,000 units over the next 20 years.

The affordable housing apartments average a higher perunit cost than the market-rate units because more of them are three bedroom units and also because the state demands that the workers who build the affordable apartments are paid "prevailing wages" when state funds are used.

The Crossings is a joint project between Westlake Development and Bridge Housing. Bridge will not only oversee and manage the affordable housing, its development division will play a major role in planning and funding for the entire development, including "infrastructure" projects like parking lots, streets, and lighting.

Just the 100-unit building was approved this week. Bridge Housing Vice President Lydia Tan said it was important to get the approval so that the company would be eligible for an additional \$8 million in state grants that are becoming available in the early spring.

Though the city council's decision was unanimous, the standing-room-only crowd at the meeting was mixed, with the dozen or so public speakers fairly evenly split about the project.

Susan Young, an Estudillo Estates homeowner and member of the anti-Crossings group "Save San Leandro," said that she approved of affordable housing in San Leandro, but the Crossings isn't the right project.

Young said that Bridge, as a non-

profit, would not contribute to property taxes. She added that the city's already overcrowded schools will also have to bear the burden of additional students who move in to the new apartments.

"This will definitely have a negative impact on our schools, which are already in dire strait," said Young. "Not to mention the impact on traffic at our intersections."

Johanne Dictor, president of the Estudillo Estates Homeowner's Association, said that she was against the project and disagreed with how the council handled the vetting process.

"Our organization is very concerned about what is happening here. I am an advocate for affordable housing, but not under these conditions," said Dictor. "I will always remember you all when it comes to a vote, because I don't think you are looking at this like you should." Frank Lynn, who founded the

"Save San Leandro" group, was even more blunt in his statement. "This project sucks," he said with a long pause, "at the government teat."

Lynn said that he hated to see San Leandro redevelopment money go to the Crossings, especially at a time when the city is considering cuts to the library, crossing guards, and other services. He presented a petition with more than 300 signatures of Estudillo Estates homeowners against the project.

"To me, it is always a bad idea to give public money to private developers," said Lynn.

Speaking in favor of the project were members of COR (Congregations Organizing for Renewal) a group that has been supporting the Crossings at several public meetings.

"This project will provide housing and jobs for San Leandro," said COR member Dan Martinez. "As our economy continues to have problems, workforce housing is needed more

than ever.

Martinez added that he would like to see the project built using local union labor.

Jeff Houston of the Sierra Club was a member of the Transit Oriented Development Citizen's Advisory Committee. He said that the project would have a positive environmental impact on San Leandro.

"It will get cars off the streets and make the city more walkable," said Houston.

All of the City Council Members Spoke in Favor Of the Project

The City Council members all spoke in favor of the project, thanking those who put it together over the past few years.

"I was introduced to this project in 2006 and I've watched it grown in popularity," said District 1 representative Michael Gregory. "I believe it will create a vibrant downtown and help combat climate change. I also believe that the developers have done an excellent job with community outreach."

Each council member said that they have listened to the public's concerns and believe that Bridge and Westlake did an adequate job of addressing them all.

"I am excited to have this work-force housing in San Leandro," said District 3 councilwoman Diana Souza. "The council has heard the concerns and we've listened to them."

The City Council's unanimous approval of the affordable housing plan is a major step forward for the Crossings project, but there are still more hurdles before construction begins.

Tan says that the City Council must still approve the 200-unit Cornerstone plan as well as continue discussions about funding. The Cornerstone plan will go in front of the Council at the April 6 meeting.