

Board Member Bush noted that he was an excused absence on December 2. Due to lack of quorum, these minutes will be deferred to a future agenda for approval.

December 09, 2020

Board Member Bush noted that he had to excuse himself from the meeting on December 9 due to a proximity conflict. Due to lack of quorum, these minutes will be deferred to a future agenda for approval.

5. PLANNING DEPARTMENT UPDATE ON MATTERS OF GENERAL INTEREST:

Associate Planner Montes advised the Board that the applicant for the Woodmark project withdrew their formal design review application and will be submitting a new application under Senate Bill 35 which, in short, means that they believe they are exempt from the design review process because they can qualify as a ministerial project as the City is not meeting our RHNA (Regional Housing Needs Allocation) allocation. At this time, they have submitted a notice of intent to apply. The City is getting the ball rolling in terms of determining whether or not it is consistent with SB 35 and the ministerial process.

In addition, he announced the recent appointment of new Board member, Marshall Balfe, who will serve as the alternate.

The Board asked questions of Associate Planner Montes.

6. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC REGARDING ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA: None.

7. STATEMENTS OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: There were none.

8. REGULAR AGENDA:

- A. DESIGN REVIEW: 6789 Walker Avenue** – Project #2021-001 – This is a Design Review application, requesting approval for the installation of oxygen storage tanks and screening in the parking lot located at 6789 Walker Avenue to serve Sebastopol Specialty Hospital.

Associate Planner Montes presented the staff report.

The Board had no questions for Associate Planner Montes.

The applicant gave a presentation and was available for questions.

The Board asked questions of the applicant.

The Board discussed the application as follows:

Cary Bush, Board Member

This is a great application, really clear, I appreciate your geographic submittal here.

Lars Langberg, Board Member

There is also a photo that I just noticed at the very end of your application that has 12 tanks in a little field, that is a nice picture.

Ted Luthin, Chair

Thank you to our applicant, we appreciate being given more information on that.

Cary Bush, Board Member

I personally like the vertical tanks. Generally, I am articulating in some of our projects where we have water tanks that kind of jut out, they are honest, they are holding water. There is a lot of infrastructure that comes to the ground level that we generally do not want to see so we actually put in a little wall around it to kind of anchor the structure itself down, it kind of gives it some weight in the loss of the base to really kind of hold it down. It also is a good visual barrier to obscure some of the piping that is running along the ground or some of the other pumps that are usually penetrating tanks, and all that other stuff. The hospital needs oxygen, so they need oxygen, and they need it to go where they can put it. I think the visual impact from the Petaluma Avenue Homes project is a little bit hard for me to get on board with to some degree. In terms of visual screening, having trees adjacent to these tanks is probably not the best foot forward. The parking lot is across from where the tanks will be and closer to the Petaluma Avenue Homes project. There are no fingers currently included in that parking lot. Today's code requires orchard parking planting a tree at least every five stalls, or less. If that is their screening opportunity, it may happen by pulling out a stall or two for the cars on that opposite parking row. That may help with the sense of scale. Crape Myrtles are a great choice tree because they are good for these conditions. Trying to hide the structures would not be honest and would probably only clutter it up even more. The chain link fence itself is just cluttering it up. It also does not have anything that really holds down the base so you are clearly seeing some chain link, some galvanized pipes coming out of the ground, and then the chain link comes in there and you can see under it and over it. It is primarily just a security issue, if we are okay with the fact that it will be purely security and access. From an aesthetic perspective, I do not think it really hits the mark, unfortunately. I love its honesty, and it is a little enclave to be able to service it, use it. I think it is great. I think a CMU block wall going up maybe four feet, and then having fencing above that may help break up the static quality of what just a chain link fence would be.

Ted Luthin, Chair

Thinking about trees, I was looking at the site plan, if you move the installation to the south, to the other side of the island, you have got a fairly large planter strip there between those two rows of parking. Right now, the oxygen tanks are on the north side. If you moved them to the south side, you could plan on the north side and screen to the apartments. I do not know what that does for the delivery vehicle now.

Applicant

I think if we move it to the south side, it will have to also move more to the west.

Ted Luthin, Chair

Moving closer to the highway, I do not know how you guys feel about it, but I really do not think it is going to be visible from the highway so moving to the west does not bother me. My personal concern is really the view from the apartments next door.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

I agree pretty much with what Board Member Bush said. Hiding some of the low-level piping is a good idea, but a nineteen-foot tank, I would rather celebrate it, really. The image I referenced earlier with the twelve tanks is a very compelling image, actually. It is an industrial kind of thing. Putting a little chain link fence in front is so incongruous, it makes it worse to me. That is why I asked about the minimum height, I would almost want something as low as possible, just to deal with security and to hide those other kinds of elements but let the nineteen feet thing go ahead. Even trees, planting trees in front of it, maybe after many years will really screen it, but in the meantime it will not hide anything.

Petaluma Avenue Homes, I saw that too when I was out there, they are looking at a pretty ugly hospital building as it is so to me, this would not make it worse. It is a necessary element for the hospital, but it is a more interesting one to me. I would be up for Chair Luthin's suggestion, if that can work and we can plant that landscape strip, but overall, it is what it is.

Ted Luthin, Chair

I like Board Member Bush's idea of screening the plumbing, basically. Right down, on Petaluma Avenue, just south on the other side of the highway there, there is the City's water tanks and they are screened with black iron fencing and it happens to have vines growing up it that I do not think we would necessarily want close to an oxygen tank, but they are dark and they kind of become transparent. You see them. They do not bother me; I pass them every day. I am not super bothered by the tank. I would be up for a low CMU wall to screen the plumbing and then go up with a black iron or something like that that will let it be more or less transparent.

Cary Bush, Board Member

Yes. I always love the fact that you can celebrate the structural. I think they are pretty cool forms, and their honesty should be celebrated. Vice Chair Langberg said it well.

Applicant

If you do talk about CMU walls to any extent, we really want to limit it to just two walls. The minute you create a third wall, and we do think it matters with the height of it, we will run into some issues with the State. I apologize, I am not an expert on all of this, but I think it might have something to do with trapping fumes. If we are going to go with CMU, we really need to limit it to two walls, if possible. We originally went in with a six-foot chain link fence with the State, and I think they requested that it become a seven-foot fence.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

Then it becomes a question of what is just a simple chain link fence? If we have to have that, what does it look like, and do we want to add planting in some fashion?

Ted Luthin, Chair

Yes. Or do we want to say that the lower three feet has some sort of visual obstruction and the other section be left open?

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

It could be a CMU wall on the north side. From Petaluma Avenue Homes you would see that as a low strip and then fence above it to a certain height.

Applicant

The north side is where the largest gate is. It is a five-foot fence and gate.

Cary Bush, Board Member

The question now for me is, is there something better than chain link? I know there is some no-climb, antitheft type of architectural fencing out there, you would have to pay a little more for that. It becomes a cost-effective issue in some way. Aesthetically, a chain link is going to be the low hanging fruit to build and to service. I am sure it will hold up well, but it is definitely not the most aesthetic and it does not glorify any of what is there, which, maybe we do not want to, but looking at least at a nicer profile fencing is probably for the best interest of the neighbors and their view in.

Ted Luthin, Chair

Shared his screen. Asked the applicant for his thoughts on using a different, and open fence material.

Applicant

Usually, these things are at the back of a hospital. If they are not in an enclosed court area that is security controlled, they either have chain link or CMU block on certain sides. Chain link is obviously the cheapest economic situation. I like what you are talking about, but we generally go with what is the most economical, and I cannot really speak for the hospital as far as if they will be excited about changing to something that may cost a little more. Ultimately, they have to do what they have to do.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

There is the fence issue and the idea of switching sides to plant, is that something we want to talk more about, or at all?

Cary Bush, Board Member

It is just going to add more cost to the project. Pocketing trees and putting in new fingers for trees on that north edge, and maybe losing two or three new parking stalls would be awesome but that would add to the scope of the project and that is not what we are here to review. I am not designing this; I am here to review it. If I had any kind of information to give here, it would be just trying to lure our client away from a chain link fence and going with something that is maybe a little architecturally suitable for its surrounding and for enclosure, also for safety, and hopefully it looks better than it would with the chain link fence around it.

Ted Luthin, Chair

Maybe we should opt for a continuance to allow the applicant to explore a more architectural solution. Consider some screening, but it sounds like that is a secondary desire from the Board. It sounds like our first priority would be a fence upgrade.

Cary Bush, Board Member

Yes, well said, Chair Luthin.

Lars Langberg, Vice Chair

Since we are dealing with a hospital, is there a schedule implication for continuing?

Applicant

There definitely is a schedule implication. The State is waiting on the local jurisdiction approval letter to be able to approve the project, it is the only thing they are waiting on. A conditional approval requiring changes to screening could suffice as the issue of screening would not be of significance to the State. I also want to make sure that everyone understands, because it has not come up, around the fencing there are bollards because this is a vehicle path of travel, essentially. The bollards are meant to protect. Even if we went with the fence that you were showing on screen, we would still have bollards out to protect it because that fence could still come down if somebody had enough speed going into it.

Ted Luthin, Chair

Thank you for pointing that out. Procedurally, it sounds like none of the Board has problems with hardware, the main part of the application. Can we approve that and then ask to see the architectural side of the fencing return?

Alan Montes, Associate Planner

We could do that. Or, if the Board wants, we could craft a condition saying that the fencing material should match the example that you showed earlier. Then, that can be verified by staff when they send it back, or we could even have one Board Member review and sign off on the submittal rather than allocating that to staff. Those are some options that you could consider.

Cary Bush, Board Member

I would be fine approving this application and giving staff the authority to approve the fencing resubmittal. Staff has heard our comments, I think we are good to go. We want to get oxygen to the hospital and not hold it up over a fence. I get that there is a visual impact to the neighbors too, that is why we have a Board. Hopefully, if we are lucky, we can get a better fence in here, with staff approval.

Alan Montes, Associate Planner

I believe that kind of fencing would be considered an anti-climb wire mesh fence.

The Board expressed being comfortable with that.

Ted Luthin, Chair

Moved to approve the application as submitted with the condition that the fence component return to staff for review and approval.

Board Member Bush seconded the motion.

AYES: Chair Luthin, Vice Chair Langberg, and Board Member Bush

NOES: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Board Members Hari, Balfe, and Level

Ted Luthin, Chair

Our thanks to the applicant for working with us and for helping us gain a better understand, we appreciate that.

9. ADJOURNMENT: Chair Luthin adjourned the meeting at 4:45 p.m. The next regularly scheduled Tree/Design Review Board meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 17, 2021 at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Kari Svanstrom
Planning Director