

MONARCH OF THE HILLS
The Examiner.
Since 1865

MONDAY, JULY 26, 2004

www.examiner.com

THE EXAMINER.

Without revealing what recommendations President

Monday, July 26, 2004

LOCAL NEWS



CINDY CHEW/THE EXAMINER

The proposed project would bring 34 condos and 63,000 square feet of construction.

Condo angst

Forest Knolls residents fight Mt. Sutro plan

BY J.K. DINEEN
Staff Writer

One of the year's fiercest development battles is heating up in the most unlikely of places: a dirt road nestled into the western slopes of Mt. Sutro.

Bursting with blackberry bushes and butterflies, the rustic, privately owned road beneath Crestmont Drive has long been a playground and dog walking trail to the families who live in the woody enclave of Forest Knolls.

On June 29, residents there were notified that developer Magomed Magomedou had proposed building 34 three- and four-bedroom condominiums on the property. The project would bring 63,000 square feet of construction to a lush and quiet neighborhood generally immune to urban noise and hassles.

"This is Mill Valley in The City," said neighbor John Valliancourt.

The project has inspired a flood of opposition from neighbors, according to city environmental reviewer Irene Nishimura, who has received 27 letters and numerous phone calls opposing the project.

"Usually, when we get that type of response it's in the South of Market or downtown," said Nishimura. "This is a neighborhood that

has not had a project like this in many years, not since the '70s."

Visiting the proposed site, it's easy to see why residents would fight tooth and nail to preserve the status quo. Above the road is a steep sloping wall of eucalyptus trees. Below is a westward-facing panoramic view: Golden Gate Park lies like a lush green stripe between the foggy pastels of the Sunset and Richmond districts.

On Friday, a fleet of bulldozers, cranes and dump trucks were clearing the land on the property. While neighbors were concerned that the developer was beginning work before having been granted approval, Nishimura said the developer needed to clear the area to do geo-tech studies.

The developer, represented by politically connected lawyer and lobbyist Robert McCarthy, has invited neighbors to a pair of community meetings in late July. The developer could not be reached for comment, but literature distributed in the neighborhood calls the development "lower density that's consistent with neighborhood character." The leaflet says the development will "give multi-generational and expanding families room to grow while staying in the neighborhood."

It also emphasizes that the buildings will be seven to 17 feet lower than zoning allows, which will "respect the views of existing homeowners on the hill above." In addition, it says the 34 homes contrast favorably with the 83 rental apartments allowed by zoning.

Crestmont Drive is a dead-end, and neighbors are afraid the condos will create a constant stream of traffic on the narrow curvy road. Resident Svetlana Kaff, a District 7 candidate for the Board of Supervisors who is organizing opposition, said the increased traffic would make it tough for fire trucks and ambulances to navigate the street.

"I don't see how a fire truck is going to turn around down there," said Kaff, an immigration attorney.

She said any project built there should be smaller and consist of single-family homes and duplexes.

"If something is built, it should be keeping in character with the neighborhood," she said.

Valliancourt said he is worried about the stability of the hill during construction.

"We have already had two or three mudslides," he said. "These houses are slipping away."

A spokesman for Supervisor Tony Hall said the District 7 representative is "monitoring the development very closely."

E-mail: jdineen@examiner.com