



EDH group gives thumbs down to odd hotel design

By Mike Roberts | Mother Lode News | February 24, 2009 12:30

What would a boutique hotel based on the universal design constant known as the Fibonacci Sequence look like on the prominent hilltop above the movie theater in El Dorado Hills

To Sam Driggers it would look like economic activity and jobs. "We need the rooms," said the county economic development coordinator. "That's a given."

The Fibonacci Sequence is a design constant found throughout nature, in pine cones and pineapples, from the spirals of sea shells to the curve of ocean waves.

Each number in the mathematical progression is the sum of the previous two, yielding the sequence 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, etc. The resulting design proportions yield naturally harmonious music, art and architecture.

Hotel Indigo embraces the universal design constant, "bringing together math, art and nature in perfect symmetry," according to the company's marketing material.

The proposed El Dorado Hills Hotel Indigo would stand five stories, providing 98 luxury hotel rooms within a 15-minute drive of the Red Hawk Casino. A sketchy conceptual drawing delivered to the El Dorado Hills Area Planning Advisory Council featured a large illuminated icon containing spiral designs stretching the entire height of the building.

The Roseville-based Heritage Hotel Group is behind the project. It operates 21 hotels from San Diego to Chico, but none as exclusive as Hotel Indigo. Their current properties include the Rancho Cordova Holiday Inn, Heritage Inn Express in Rocklin and Roseville, and Best Westerns throughout the Northern California.

The Hotel Indigo concept was created by the InterContinental Hotel Group, which includes the megabrands Holiday Inn, Candlewood Suites and Crown Plaza.

The rapidly growing group boasts 4,100 hotels with more than 600,000 guest rooms, making it the world's largest hotel group by number of rooms, according to a recent press release.

Hotel Indigo is the smallest brand in the IHG fleet, with 22 hotels today and 56 more in the pipeline through franchisees such as the Heritage Hotel Group.

Company marketing literature describes Hotel Indigo as "affordable luxury - artfully combining the conveniences and consistencies of a brand hotel with the design cache and service personality of a boutique."

The company recently announced a flagship Hotel Indigo opening in San Diego's Gas Lamp District later in 2009. A press release touts the project's environmentally friendly design as reflecting the "culture, character and geography of the surrounding area." Room rates are posted at \$299 per night.

El Dorado Hills APAC members didn't see the same sensitivity to local surroundings in the hotel plans they reviewed.



They were concerned the project's aesthetics weren't compatible with the architecture of Town Center or the topography of El Dorado Hills.

Members also objected to the height of the five-story structure, especially on the highly visible hilltop location east of Town Center.

The 1.9-acre parcel lies within the El Dorado Hills Town Center East subdivision, west of Rossmoor Lane, which leads to Lakehills Church, immediately east of Town Center.

Due to a fast turnaround requested by staff with the El Dorado County Planning Division no one from the Heritage Hotel Group was present to answer questions. APAC chairman John Hidahl was unsure that the group's management had been notified.

Contacted by phone, Heritage development director Veenay Solanki said he was unaware of APAC, and that the company's policy is to keep quiet about its projects until further in the development process. He would not release any photos or project information beyond what the county Planning Division submitted to APAC.

Tough audience

Ellison Rumsey reviewed the project as chairman of the El Dorado Hills Community Services District's Design Review Committee. He objected to the five-story height and signage, which extends above the roof. As for the building's avant garde design, "It needs to look better," he said.

Other meeting attendees called the hilltop structure and large nautical icon "ludicrous," adding "It will stick out like a sore thumb."

Paul Raveling questioned the traffic impact, especially if the hotel opens prior to construction of the Silva Valley interchange.

Doug Weile addressed the council representing neighboring Lakehills Covenant Church, and as a member of the Town Center East owners' association design review committee. Weile, who is a developer in his own right, is also the leasing agent for Town Center.

He provided some history on the commercial parcel, which he said was included in the El Dorado Hills specific plan, but not in the Town Center planned development. The church purchased their 20-acre parcel in 1997 and subdivided it into three parcels, one of which is the hotel property.

Weile told APAC members the hotel project is subject to review from the Lakehills Church council, which has not received any plans from the Heritage Hotel Group for more than a year.

County commercial code calls for one space per hotel room, plus one RV space per 10 rooms. Hotel Indigo's 98 rooms would require parking for 107 vehicles. The plans call for only 85.

"Lakehills Church wants to be a good neighbor, but we're not obliged to share our parking or allow a



building over 50 feet,” he said.

Hidahl acknowledged that a five-story building wouldn't normally comply with county height regulations, but left open the possibility that the structure might be cut into the hillside. The design document indicates that the height of the structure is 49.8 feet.

“We're a little concerned about the icon feature on the front of the building,” said Baron. “Sitting there on the hill it will be very visible from the freeway.”

APAC members voted non-support of the project based on concerns about the height of the building, traffic impacts, the parking and the hilltop aesthetics. APAC's letter of non-support suggests that county planners delay considering the project until those questions can be answered.

“We just don't have enough [information] to make a good recommendation,” said APAC chairman Hidahl.

County senior planner Mike Barron confirmed by phone that the Heritage Hotel Group has requested design waivers for both the parking and height, and that the project was likely at least two months from being ready for the county Planning Commission.

County Economic Development Coordinator Driggers said by phone that he was disappointed Heritage representatives couldn't explain their project to APAC, “to demonstrate to the community that they can be a good partner.”

Driggers also confirmed that the proposed hotel's design is a break from what's in Town Center today, but, he added, “Diverse types of architecture can be blended, but people have to be willing to talk.”