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Artists aid housing proposal

El Dorado Hills services needed for theater, gallery.

By Cathy Locke - Bee Staff Writer

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Golf courses and recreational centers are draws for many residential developments, but few can promise live theater and an art gallery at the front gate.

A proposal to build nearly 400 residences in El Dorado Hills cleared a critical hurdle in the development process this week, thanks in part to vocal support from thespians and patrons of the arts, who also seek a home in the foothills.

Young actors and board members of the El Dorado Musical Theatre, along with the executive director of the Sacramento Philharmonic, urged the El Dorado Local Agency Formation Commission to approve annexations necessary to provide public services to the Marble Valley area.

Development of 2,549 acres south of Highway 50, between the Bass Lake Road and Cambridge Road interchanges, will bring water and sewer service to the area, a prerequisite for building the long-planned Marble Valley Regional Center for the Arts.

El Dorado County residents value a quality of life that's "not measured by the number of strip malls and Starbucks available," said Richard Wilson, chairman of El Dorado Musical Theatre's board of directors, in urging approval of annexations to the El Dorado Irrigation District and El Dorado Hills Community Services District.

The theater group, despite its name, currently stages productions in Folsom due to lack of facilities in El Dorado County.

It would be among those performing at the Marble Valley center, planned on 22 acres the Cowell Foundation donated to the nonprofit Center for the Arts in 1990. The property is at the entrance to the proposed development.

Plans call for a 1,000-seat theater, a visual arts wing, and a multiuse theater for smaller productions and meetings. A 2,500-square-foot visitor center and a high-tech business conference center also are proposed.

Center backers hope the extension of public services and construction of the residential community planned by Parker Development Co., developer of Serrano, will add momentum to their fundraising.

"Everything is a go on this," said Wayne Lowery, general manager of the El Dorado Hills Community Services District. Lowery also has served on the center's board of directors.

Marc Feldman, the Sacramento Philharmonic's executive director, said the group would like to offer performances throughout the region.

"One reason we haven't been able to is the lack of venues," he said.

The Marble Valley center would provide a place for concerts as well as the orchestra's educational programs, he said.

Though arts center proponents held the spotlight in advocating the annexations, commission members raised questions about the residential development.

Rusty Dupray, who represents the county Board of Supervisors on LAFCO, praised plans for the arts center, but he sought assurances that the Marble Valley developer would maintain the proposed

configuration for the residential project.

The proposal calls for 398 single-family homes to be developed in "villages" on approximately 264 acres, with 1,840 acres designated as open space. The project also includes a private clubhouse, 13-acre elementary school site and an 11-acre community park.

Dupray said he had heard rumors that the applicant planned to come back with a request to build 2,000 homes.

"My constituents do not want 2,000 homes," he said.

Kirk Bone, a spokesman for Parker Development, said the intent is to follow through with the plan, but he declined to rule out changes.

"I would feel uncomfortable making an unequivocal commitment," he said.

Commissioner Francesca Loftus questioned whether the El Dorado Irrigation District could serve a larger development.

Brian Cooper, a district engineer, said the outlook for water supply to the area is good. He cited approval to draw additional water from Folsom Lake and work to expand the El Dorado Hills water treatment plant.

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