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Planners sold on affordable housing plan

But Shingle Springs residents object to density of proposed subdivision: About 7 homes per acre.

By Cathy Locke - Bee Staff Writer

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El Dorado County Planning Commission members said the promise of affordable housing sold them on the idea of a Shingle Springs subdivision featuring small houses on small lots.

But homeowners near the proposed Shingle Creek Village argued that a development with about seven homes per acre is not in keeping with the rural character of the community.

Representatives of Granite Bay Holdings LLC sought the commission's comments last week on their vision for a 144-lot subdivision on 20 acres south of Mother Lode Drive and southwest of French Creek Road.

Larry Appel, deputy director of planning services, said the "conceptual review" is a new step in the planning process for projects that would require a general plan amendment. The review allows a developer to receive commission and public comment on a prospective project before filing an application.

In this case, general plan and zone changes would be required to allow residential development on acreage currently designated for commercial use.

"The project is unique in its problems," said Tyler Wade of Granite Bay Holdings. "It is a very challenging site to develop. We came up with this option to allow us to deal with some of the constraints."

Those constraints include steep slopes on portions of the property, wetlands and oak trees.

The project calls for small, detached single-family homes on lots ranging from 1,800 to approximately 6,000 square feet. What Wade described as entry-level homes would be built in clusters to avoid the wetlands and to preserve as many trees as possible.

But several residents of the neighboring Hacienda de Estrella development objected to the density of the proposed project, citing potential effects on traffic, drainage and Shingle Springs' rural character.

Traffic backs up now on Mother Lode Drive during morning commute hours, and a 144-home development would add about 300 cars, said Todd Bissell.

A ravine also runs through the project site, which is subject to flooding, he said.

In addition, the residential development would contribute to already crowded conditions in schools serving the Shingle Springs area, he said, citing Buckeye Elementary, Camerado Springs Middle School and Ponderosa High School.

Bissell said he built his home in Hacienda de Estrella, east of the proposed subdivision, 13 years ago. With houses valued in the \$900,000 to \$1 million range on lots of 2 to 10 acres, the neighborhood is "the exact opposite of what they propose," Bissell said, arguing that the two developments are not compatible.

He called for retaining the commercial designation, saying small businesses along Mother Lode Drive are in a period of revitalization.

Lisa Culver, a Hacienda de Estrella resident and owner of a business on Mother Lode Drive, also

avored retaining the commercial designation, saying she feared allowing higher-density residential development would set a precedent for other property in the area.

"It seems to be very contradictory to what we as homeowners have gotten accustomed to," Culver said.

Several area residents argued that if the property were rezoned for residential use, lot sizes should be in line with those in their neighborhood.

Art Marinaccio, a Shingle Springs resident and land-use consultant, said he considered the proposed Shingle Creek Village project appropriate for the site. When Hacienda de Estrella was built, he said, the county allowed residential development on commercially zoned land.

The project would help fill a critical need, he said.

"This is our work force housing," Marinaccio said. "These are homes that people who work for the county can live in."

Planning Commission members said they would be receptive to a general plan amendment allowing residential uses.

Commission members John MacCready and Walter Mathews suggested a mixed-use or "blended" development with commercial uses along Mother Lode Drive and residential units on the southern part of the property.

Mathews said he liked the idea of clustering the homes, but called for a less dense development. "I don't think 7.2 units per acre is appropriate for the neighborhood," he said.

Commission member Dave Machado said he thought a general plan amendment would serve the public interest.

"Affordable housing is what I'd hang my hat on," he said.

Neighboring homeowners should keep in mind that commercial uses such as liquor stores or fast-food restaurants might be less appealing than a development of small homes, Machado said. Given the slopes and wetlands on the site, he said, "I don't think you will end up with 144 new homes."

Appel said planning staff members would work with Granite Bay Holdings on a formal development proposal.

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