

Received Merced City
Planning Dept.
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To : Merced City Planning Staff and Planning Commission

From : Michael Belluomini, MUP, Councilmember 2013-18

CC : Merced City Council, City Manager, BSB Design

Ref : Devonwood 156 Apartments GPA #20-01 & SUP Rev #23

Anticipating the increase in apartment development that is occurring the City Council added "Design Standards for Multi-Family Dwellings" to the zoning ordinance in 2016. It set standards that increase safety, reduce crime, increase a sense of neighborhood watch and belonging, and increased the health/quality of living environment of future apartment dwellers.

The Devonwood 156 apartment project generally is well designed. It provides large stairway landings outside each of four apartments. This creates a "semi-private" space where tenants will feel justified questioning strangers loitering there, what business they have being on that landing. This discourages vandalism, burglary, and mugging. There are no long corridors. It provides an arrangement of apartments in two clusters with a recreation area in the center of each which has surveillance from 33 or more apartments. This facilitates neighbors observing inappropriate or criminal behavior in the recreation areas.

There are areas which can be improved to make the apartments a better living environment and more in compliance with the city Design Standards for Multi-Family Dwellings.

Zoning Ordinance Chapter 20.46 section 'H'

1. Placement of windows and doors should facilitate neighborhood surveillance of their neighbor's entryway.

None of the apartment doors and landings have a window looking out onto them for neighborhood watch type surveillance. The apartment design could be changed to provide a small window providing surveillance of the landing and adjoining apartments doors.

5. Keyed access gates and surveillance cameras should be installed to enter common areas.

The concept plan is unclear regarding the fencing and secure access of the entire project. Driveways need access code operated gates as do pedestrian fence gates. It is critical to discourage intruders from entering the apartment complex.

Zoning Ordinance Chapter 20.46 section 'I' sections 1 and 2 paraphrased state "Every dwelling unit should, if feasible, have a private outdoor useable space/balcony of a minimum size of 5 ft. by 8 ft. (40 sq. ft)

The apartment design provides balconies and ground floor patios of 3ft by 9.3 ft. (28 sq. ft.) The City Council required balconies of a minimum of 5 ft. by 8 ft. after consultation with a citizens committee that included apartment developers and managers. A survey of existing apartment balconies in 2016 revealed that those narrower than 5 ft. were unusable for people gathering around a table. Narrow balconies such as the ones proposed were often used as a storage area for equipment/bicycles and not as outdoor recreation space.

Private outdoor space is important to the physical and emotional health of apartment dwellers. For elderly tenants, handicapped/ill tenants, and mothers caring for young children, a trip to the ground floor recreation area is a difficult ordeal while a balcony is easily accessible for fresh air, sunshine, and a connection to the outside world and nature.

This standard was required of the large apartment project at the corner of Lake Rd. and Yosemite Ave in 2017 and in fairness should be applied uniformly here.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Require placement of windows or door windows facing the stairway landings in each apartment where feasible.
- 2) Require fencing, and driveway gates with coded/keyed access to limit access to tenants except at entrance to leasing office.
- 3) Require each 3ft. by 9.3 ft. balcony/patio to be enlarged to 5ft. by 9.3 ft. in every apartment.