

PASADENA STAR-NEWS

Tuesday, March 13, 2007 www.pasadenastarnews.com

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Council weighs huge project

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Hearing held on complex Ambassador plan

PASADENA — The scope and complexity of the Ambassador West Project — and a disputed property line opponents hope will put a brake on the development — led to a marathon public hearing at Monday's City Council meeting.

Before the presentation from city staff — who recommended approval — developer Dorn Platz, Harvest Rock

Church and its attorneys, public comment, council questions and discussions, Mayor Bill Bogaard warned the council was unlikely to make a decision Monday.

"Obviously this a matter of tremendous effort, tremendous importance," Bogaard said to a standing-room-only crowd.

It's taken eight years for a project to

come before the council for the former Ambassador College campus, one of the last prime sites in the city available for large-scale development.

Bogaard said the decision should not be rushed.

Council members dissected the project proposals, but much of the public interest centered on Sunrise Senior Living.

Opponents, including Harvest Rock's pastor, Che Ahn, argued that the six-story, 450,000-square-foot building overwhelmed the site.

In a dispute over property lines, Harvest Rock's attorney said Dorn Platz's plans show 18 of the 200 Sunrise condos will be built on church property.

Greg Galletly, president of Glendale-based Dorn Platz, dismissed the

claim as caused by a clerical error.

The Sunrise building, he said, "comfortably fits the envelope," and is one of the critical balancing factors that would allow 70 percent of 19.72-acre site as open space.

Ahn appealed to the council to delay any decision until a review by the city's design commission of the Sunrise Building and until the disputed property line issues have been

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resolved.

"We think overall it's a great, great project. Our problem is with the density right next to our building. ... We are concerned by the size, the scope, design and mass," he said.

As proposed, the assisted-living building at Green Street and St. John Avenue has 145 luxury condos on the lower level connected by a bridge with 55 upper-level units.

The former Ambassador College's 47-acre campus at the city's western entrance was finally sold off in three pieces by the Worldwide Church of God after two previous attempts at developing the site — including one by the church itself — failed.

The developers have said the scale and density are allowable under the specific city zoning laws for the district, and the building's size is a trade-off for the large percentage of open space left on the site.

Opponents, including the influential West Pasadena Residents Association, said the developments proposed — with anything from 1,200 to 1,900 homes — were too dense and would swamp the upscale area with traffic.

In 2004, one parcel was bought by Maranatha, a Christian high school, which relocated to the site from Sierra Madre; the famed Ambassador

Auditorium was bought by Harvest Rock Church; and the 12-acre east campus was bought by Sares Regis for a mixed retail and residential project.

The 19.72 acres remaining on the original west campus were bought by Dorn Platz in 2004 for an undisclosed amount.

Twelve acres will stay as public open space, preserving the Italian and Fowler gardens, Grove Walk, Great Lawn, Rose Garden, the historic homes and 80 percent of the trees, according to the proposal.

Now the remainder of the site is being developed, Harvest Rock officials have complained that the senior condos loom too close and overshadow the auditorium.

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