

Shape Our Fremont

Where Fremont residents can learn about shaping proposed housing developments...

Top Development Concerns

With the constant influx of new housing development proposals in Fremont, it is hard to focus on the ones that cause the greatest concerns. Here are three that seem to be on top of the list.

Walnut Residences

If a single development symbolizes many of the concerns that Fremont residents have about new housing projects, the Walnut Residences project might be it. The current proposal to build 670 luxury apartments on the old Ramirez Farm site near the Downtown Fremont BART station has continued to draw critical comments from residents across the city.

At meeting after meeting, residents have stated that the number of units is too large, the rents for the units will be too high, the heights of the buildings are too tall, the setbacks from the street are too small, and there will be too much traffic with not enough parking.

Neighbors contend that the large number of units and the four- and five-story buildings don't fit with the community character of the surrounding neighborhoods. They say all of the existing developments in the area were approved with fewer units and lower building heights, and the City should do the same on this site.

Residents also point out this property was specified as a Planned District with a maximum of 440 units back in 2004, and it was excluded from being part of a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Overlay in 2012. Both of those conditions limit the number of units allowed on the property; both were approved by previous City Councils; and both were in effect when the developer purchased the property. The developer is asking to nullify those conditions and allow more units. The residents are saying that 440 units is already within the urban density range and the number is about right for the area.

And finally, the rents for all these units are to be above market rate. Critics note that Fremont has already approved projects to provide over 400 percent of the above-market-rate housing units needed to meet the State's goals, and we certainly don't need any more. Some residents say that a smaller number of moderate-rate, owner-occupied condominiums would provide the type of housing that is really needed in the community.

See the Shape Our Fremont website for the date of the City Council hearing on this project. This will be the last chance for residents to voice their concerns.

Innovation District

Although a recent survey revealed that most residents don't know much about Fremont's Innovation District, the sheer number of housing units planned for the area is enough to make it a serious concern. Right now the master plan calls for 4,000 dwellings, ranging from studio apartments to multi-family townhouses, clustered around the new Warm Springs BART station.

Initial descriptions and drawings of the proposed project included a mix of housing units up to six stories high, a possible convention center, office buildings, restaurants, and retail stores in a pedestrian-oriented area. So far, most of the actual plans are for housing units, making some people wonder if this will be just another high-density residential area.

Critics point out that the high concentration of dwellings, and the large number of BART riders converging on the new station from nearby areas, will have severe impacts on traffic throughout the entire southern part of Fremont. They also note that there are no plans for a new freeway connector between Interstate 880 and Interstate 680 to alleviate the current crossover traffic on surface streets.

Mega-Mansions

And finally, the continuing trend of tearing down small older houses and replacing them with very large new houses has drawn opposition from residents in all parts of Fremont. The objections aren't that the new houses are large; it's that they are disproportionately large for the neighborhood and destroy the community character of the area.

For example, most tract-type houses built on 8,000-square-foot lots have a total floor area of 2,000 to 3,000 square feet, including the garage. However, under the current Fremont standards for single-family houses, a two-story house with 5,100 square feet of floor area would be legal. That's huge. Many executive houses in San Ramon and Cupertino aren't that big -- and if they are, they are on much larger lots.

Many people argue that these overly large mega-mansions can invade the privacy of nearby residents, destroy views, and potentially block direct sunlight to solar panels and gardens. They say the City's newly adopted Privacy Guidelines do not adequately address these issues.

Several residents have asked the City to enact different size standards for all existing single-family residential areas in Fremont, but so far there has been no action. Residents vow to continue their fight.

For more information on all this development, visit **www.ShapeOurFremont.com**