

## Development plan has Woodland Hills homeowners riled

Owners prepare to fight developer

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WOODLAND HILLS - Months will pass before a bulldozer blade chews into the earth, maybe. But opponents are already tossing dirt clods at each other with the kind of spin the Dodgers' pitching staff could use on their breaking stuff.

The uproar is over DS Ventures plans for a 37-unit housing development north of Mulholland Drive and Mulholland Highway in Woodland Hills because it's technically a condominium complex, according to city planning documents. And nothing like this currently exists in the neighborhood of mostly one-story houses.

City Councilman Dennis Zine, who represents the area and will end up being the mediator, offered a different take.

"Someone put out a panic letter," he said, when asked about homeowner unease.

Nevertheless, it's never too early to get the dander up.

And the simmering dispute illustrates just how touchy building new homes in established neighborhoods can be these days.

Shortly after homeowners learned of DS Ventures' plans, they organized "Save Oak Savanna." (When residents oppose something, it always helps to come up with a catchy acronym.)

DS Ventures' plans call for clustering the homes, which will be expensive, on the six acres of land, which is in an area covered by the Mulholland Drive Scenic Corridor Specific Plan. The company's purchase of the property is in escrow.

Homeowners wonder just how scenic this kind of arrangement will be, and have already issued a press release critical of the project.

"The view shed would be a sea of rooftops," it said.

Said Lauri Hope, chairwoman of the SOS media committee: "We don't want this to happen."

SOS also has 11 other committees, including ones focused on legal and environmental issues, and a Web site. Each block has a captain to keep neighbors informed of the development's project. Residents in the area also have instructions to write a letter to Zine and send copies to other city officials, including Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

SOS worries that what DS Ventures is planning won't fit in with the neighborhood, that too many oak trees will be cut down, and that traffic will increase.

"We are going to chip away at each step of the process. We're not going to let this development get out of hand," said Hope.

According to city planning documents, DS Ventures has applied to:

Change the zoning from R1 (single-family) to RD6 (restricted density, multiple dwelling).

Get a tentative tract map for a 37-unit condominium project, which will require an environmental review.

So SOS is adamant that this will be a condominium project.

I figured DS's Marc Annotti could clear up things, so I gave him a call. He answered his phone, then said he was in the middle of something and promised to call back.

The next day I got a call from Lisa Gritzner, vice president of Cerrell Associates Inc. She offered to talk about the project, but only on background. This usually means reporters can only report what the backgrounder says, but can't say they said it.

This ploy is common to City Hall staffers, and Gritzner is the former chief of staff to former Los Angeles City Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski.

Seems weird that a paid public-relations spokeswoman wouldn't say anything nice for public consumption about her client.

But a source familiar with Annotti's plans offered nothing that wasn't available in the public record or available from city officials.

For example, under the current zoning, Annotti could build 54 homes on 5,000-square-foot lots, but that is not likely because of the extensive bulldozing that would be necessary.

So what Annotti wants to do is put each of the 37 units on one or two big parcels. Hence the condo designation. And a homeowners association, another condo thing, would be formed to maintain the open space that would surround the project.

The units would not share common walls, though, and would be about 10 feet apart. But that's barely enough room for Houston Rockets center Yao Ming to lie down and stretch out.

Right now, only one thing is certain. This project is going to take a long time to wind through the bureaucracy.

Zine said he won't support a condo project, though the way the project is laid out, that might be a fine splitting of the bureaucratic hair.

And Annotti might be seeking too much.

"I have a concern that the number may be too high. The property owner has certain rights and I want to respect them. And I want to respect the wishes and needs of the community," Zine said.

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