

Competitors pitch plans for Patterson Ranch

Fremont urges housing project construction, takes no stance on density

By Scott Wong, STAFF WRITER
Inside Bay Area

FREMONT — Pastors asked that some land at Patterson Ranch be reserved for churches. Youth sports advocates said they wanted new playing fields built, while housing advocates pushed for the construction of affordable homes.

But environmentalists — clearly the largest and most vocal group at this week's City Council meeting — said they just wanted Fremont's last large undeveloped parcel left alone.

Competing interests regarding the future of the 427-acre parcel in north Fremont's Ardenwood neighborhood were never more apparent than Tuesday night at City Hall.

More than 150 citizens packed the Council Chambers and an overflow room for a chance to sound off on a proposed project to build 1,300 to 1,500 housing units, a school, a community park and an open-space area.

"This is important habitat that needs to be preserved," said Hayward resident Evelyn Cormier, 73, a former Ardenwood Elementary teacher and president of the Ohlone Audubon Society. "It abuts Coyote Hills, which is important bird habitat; it's near Don Edwards (San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge), which is home to a number of endangered species and is a regional treasure."

A spokesman for the Patterson family — which has built several neighborhoods and helped construct two elementary schools, and improved streets in Ardenwood — argued that land

owners have the right to build on their property in the United States.

"We don't think we've been greedy," said San Mateo planner Richard Frisbie, who has been hired by the family.

"The Patterson family has been very generous, and will continue to be generous."

Council members, who were given their first peek at conceptual plans for the project Tuesday, took no formal vote on the matter, nor did they say how many houses they wanted to see on the site.

Instead, they said they were interested in seeing a balance between preserving open space and completing a distinctive residential project that would provide room for a new elementary school, parks and some retail.

"I don't want to see something from (the movie) 'American Beauty' with a typical suburban development," said Councilmember Anu Natarajan, who disclosed that she formerly worked for a San Francisco planning firm now working on the Fremont project. "If we decide to go down the path of development, it has to be something really creative, really different and something we can work together on."

While some council members warmed to the idea of building football, soccer, baseball and even cricket fields at the site, others expressed concerns about environmental impacts, such as lighting and noise.

Vice Mayor Dominic Dutra said a major housing project likely would produce \$1 billion worth of development rights.

He wanted to know if the developer was open to building a performing arts center, possibly in downtown Fremont, as part of a deal.

The development team plans to incorporate community and council feedback into final project plans that will be presented during a community meeting later this month or in early August.

"I don't think anything that is said tonight is set in concrete," Mayor Bob Wasserman said. "This is not an ending. This is simply a beginning."

For a detailed look at plans, visit <http://www.pattersonranch.net>. To learn more about the group opposing the project, visit <http://www.fchf.org>.

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