



STAFF REPORT

TO: Planning Commission and City Council **DATE:** October 28, 2004

FROM: Diane Henderson, Contract Planner

SUBJECT: Study Session to review three proposed projects and provide comment regarding process and policy. The three projects are: a.) 20 attached residential units on East Blithedale at Camino Alto, APN 030-021-47; b.) 13 attached residential units at 542 Miller Avenue, APN 048-134-60, currently outside the corporate limits; and c.) a mixed-use development, including 6,075 square-feet of commercial space (office and retail) and 20 attached residential units at 500 Miller Avenue, APN 048-071-38 and -39, currently outside the corporate limits.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Planning Commission and City Council review, hear public testimony, discuss, and provide initial comments to the applicants and staff on the proposed projects.

INTRODUCTION:

The item for discussion this evening is the processing of three development proposals that will be considered by the City in the near future. The format for this item is a study session, which is basically a work session for the applicants, Planning Commission and City Council to review the proposals and anticipated application processing schedules at a preliminary development stage. No formal action (i.e. approval or denial) will be taken at this meeting; rather, initial comments on the proposed projects will be given by the Planning Commission and City Council. A time for public input is part of the study session. Items for discussion at this study session include: annexation, General Plan land use designations, zoning, density, general architectural design, parking and traffic, and land use and design compatibility with neighborhoods. Because of the volume of information to be presented at the study session, the project applicants will not be making presentations.

The three proposed projects are as follows:

- a. **East Blithedale at Camino Alto:** Philip Richardson is proposing to construct 20 attached residential units on the 51,605-square-foot site identified as Marin County Assessor's Parcel Number 030-021-47. The subject property is currently zoned PA (Professional Administrative Office).
- b. **542 Miller Avenue:** Joel Coopersmith is proposing to construct 13 attached residential units on a 1.39-acre site located outside the corporate boundaries of the City of Mill Valley, within the County of Marin, identified as Marin County Assessor's Parcel Number 048-134-60. The subject property is currently zoned R3-G3-H (Multi-Family Residential; one unit per 2,500 square-feet of land area or 17 units per acre) in the Marin County Zoning Code.
- c. **500 Miller Avenue:** Al von der Werth is proposing to construct a mixed-use development, including 6,075 square-feet of commercial space (office and retail) and 20 attached residential units on a 1.63-acre site located outside the corporate boundaries of the City of Mill Valley, within the County of Marin, identified as Marin County Assessor's Parcel Numbers 048-071-38 and -39. The subject property is currently zoned C-2-H (General Commercial) and R-1 (Single Family Residential, 7,500-square-foot minimum lot size) in the Marin County Zoning Code.

The staff report describes each project below, including an analysis of General Plan and zoning concerns, potential issues associated with the project and describes the anticipated process for each project.

a. **EAST BLITHEDALE AT CAMINO ALTO**

The proposed project site is located on the north side of East Blithedale, just west of its intersection with Camino Alto. This undeveloped property is 51,605 square-feet in size, and is within the area historically referred to as Kite Hill. Access to the site would be from a new curb cut on East Blithedale, generally opposite its intersection with Ryan Avenue.

The project site is an in-fill parcel, located between the existing commercial office development to the east at the northwest corner of East Blithedale and Camino Alto and the single-family detached residential development to the north and west. Across East Blithedale to the south is Gira Polli on the corner, and single-family detached residential development further west (see surrounding land use map, Attachment E).

Project Description:

The project proposes the construction of five, three- and four-story buildings containing a total of 20 housing units and 45 parking spaces on the parcel. The proposed units include two- and three-bedroom floor plans, which are proposed to range in size from 1,820

square-feet to 2,187 square-feet. All units are proposed to have two-car garages and there are five surface guest parking spaces, two of which are compact size.

The buildings lower on the site, adjacent to the East Blithedale frontage, are proposed to be three-story structures and the buildings higher on the hill are four-stories in height. The buildings at their highest point are proposed to be 30 feet in height.

General Plan Designation:

The property is currently designated Professional, Administrative Office use in the General Plan. The Mill Valley Housing Element, adopted in September, 2003, identifies this site as a potential housing site, noting that a General Plan Amendment and rezoning to Lower Density Multi-Family would be required to develop the site for housing. Housing Element Implementing Program H3.L includes initiating a General Plan Amendment to Lower Density Multi-Family as an objective. Further, pursuant to the City's inclusionary zoning ordinance, the applicant would be required to provide 15% of these "for sale" units, or three units, at moderate income prices.

Zoning:

The property is currently zoned PA (Professional Administrative Office). Mill Valley General Plan Policy C-8-2 calls for rezoning this site to Lower Density Multi-Family, which would allow a maximum of 16 units to be developed on the site. Utilization of the density bonus law would allow for the 20 units proposed, and as identified in the Housing Element. As stated in Housing Element Implementing Program H3.L, the City would initiate implementation of Policy C-8-2 by January 2005, to facilitate residential development of the site. Rezoning to RM 2.5 would be consistent with a land use designation of Lower Density Multi-Family.

Issues:

Land Use:

In response to Housing Element law, the City is required to provide an inventory of known sites available for housing development as well as vacant and/or underdeveloped sites that can accommodate Mill Valley's housing development needs, as determined by ABAG, by June 2006. As stated in the adopted Housing Element, there are few potential housing sites in Mill Valley planned and zoned for multiple-family housing. In order to have the potential to meet the ABAG Regional Housing needs for affordable housing, the Mill Valley Housing Element identifies additional sites where it is possible to build multiple-family housing at densities which make affordable housing feasible. This site is one of those sites identified in the Housing Element as appropriate for affordable housing development. Specifically, Housing Element Implementing Program H3.L states that the City will facilitate development at the Camino Alto/East Blithedale site. In order to meet this program objective, it will be necessary to process a General Plan Amendment and rezoning.

Access:

Access to the site is proposed to be from a new curb cut on East Blithedale, generally opposite its intersection with Ryan Avenue. This is a busy portion of East Blithedale, located just west of its intersection with Camino Alto and generally at that place where the westbound lanes narrow from two to one. Traffic flow is further complicated in this location by westbound vehicles who are stopped, waiting to make a left turn onto Ryan Avenue. Access into and out of the site may be challenging during periods of high traffic volumes.

Traffic:

As indicated above, access to this site is difficult. As part of the environmental review for this project, a full traffic study would be required to determine what impact, the addition of 20 residential dwelling units at this location would have on traffic and circulation both on- and off-site. The traffic study would look at potential impacts to roadways and intersections and determine what improvements, if any, would be required to alleviate potential traffic impacts.

Visual Impact:

The project proposes to introduce development to a long vacant site, historically referred to as Kite Hill. Although designated for development, this hill has been a part of Mill Valley's open space. The proposed design will introduce urban forms at a fairly significant density. Any development of the site must include appropriate architectural designs and finishes which will complement surrounding development as well as open space areas.

Trees:

There are a number of acacia, oak and pine trees on the site that would be removed as part of this proposal. Although the plans submitted by the applicant show an intent to relocate some of the trees, the likelihood of their survival is unknown. The applicant is proposing to plant a number of trees to replace trees that must be removed; however, younger trees do not initially provide the same visual amenity as older, established trees.

Process:

Following the study session, the applicant will take the comments received on this project and prepare more significant plans and application materials consistent with the direction provided by the Planning Commission and City Council, to be submitted to the City for formal consideration. Once the project is deemed complete by City staff (meaning that all of the required application materials have been submitted), an Initial Study will be prepared, pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), to determine whether or not the project may have a significant effect on the environment. If the project may cause a significant effect on the environment, an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) must be prepared. In the case of this project, staff has indicated to the applicant that it is likely that an EIR will be required. A consulting firm would be retained by the City to prepare the EIR, the cost of which would be borne by the developer. An EIR generally takes a minimum of six months to prepare.

Following completion of the EIR, the project, including General Plan Amendment, rezoning, would be considered by the Planning Commission and City Council.

b. 542 MILLER AVENUE

The proposed project site is located on Miller Avenue on the hillside above 530 and 546 Miller Avenue. The 60,650-square-foot parcel is a rectangular-shaped site which currently is the location of an abandoned single-family home. This structure would be demolished as part of the proposed development. Access to the site would be from an existing curb cut off Miller Avenue and an expanded driveway in generally the alignment of the current drive.

Surrounding land uses include vacant County land to the west with access off Homestead, and commercial properties to the north, east and south with access off Miller Avenue, but within County jurisdiction. (See surrounding land use map, Attachment F).

Project Description:

The project proposes the construction of seven, two- and three-story buildings containing a total of 13 housing units and 35 parking spaces on the parcel. The proposed buildings are a combination of single units, duplexes and triplexes. The individual units would range in size between 900 square-feet and 2,400 square-feet. All units are proposed to have two car garages except for the "C" units which would have single car garages. Additionally, there would be 11 surface guest parking spaces.

The buildings lower on the site are proposed to be two-story structures and the buildings higher on the hill are generally three stories. The buildings at their highest point are proposed to be 35 feet. Access is proposed to be from one, 20-foot wide driveway off Miller Avenue in the general location of the existing driveway up the hill.

General Plan Designation:

Because this site is located outside the City's corporate boundary, it is not within the Mill Valley General Plan. The site is included in the Marin County Comprehensive Plan, Tamalpais Area Community Plan, Homestead Valley section, with a land use designation of Neighborhood Commercial along the Miller Avenue frontage and Multi-Family on the rear portion up the hill. The Multi-Family land use designation allows 5-30 dwelling units/gross acre with an average population density not to exceed a maximum of 45 persons per gross acre. Duplexes and triplexes are permitted land use in this category. There are a few policies and programs in the Tamalpais Area Community Plan which encourage annexation of this parcel and the commercial sites along Miller Avenue into the City of Mill Valley (see Attachment G, Marin County Comprehensive Plan information.)

The City of Mill Valley General Plan only discusses annexation policies with regard to this site, specifically indicating that the City should favorably consider any requests for