

DATE ISSUED: September 9, 2004 **REPORT NO.** PC-04-144

ATTENTION: Planning Commission, Agenda of September 16, 2004

SUBJECT: **SORORITY ROW – PROJECT NO. 6036**
PROCESS 5

REFERENCE: College Area Community Plan -
<http://www.sandiego.gov/planning/pdf/commpans/collegearea/cacpfullversion.pdf>

College Community Redevelopment Project Master Project Plan -
<http://www.sandiego.gov/redevelopment-agency/pdf/masterprojectplan.pdf>

**OWNER/
APPLICANT:** SDSU FOUNDATION (Attachment 15)

SUMMARY

Issues – Should the Planning Commission recommend to the City Council approval of a Planned Development Permit, Site Development Permit, Conditional Use Permit, Tentative Map, and vacation of a sewer and drainage easement for the construction of a sorority housing development on College Avenue between College Place and Cresita Drive?

Staff Recommendation:

1. Recommend **Certification** of Mitigated Negative Declaration No. 6036 and adoption of the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP); and
2. Recommend Approval of Planned Development Permit No. 142191, Site Development Permit No. 9998, Conditional Use Permit No. 9997, Tentative Map No. 9996, and Easement Vacation No. 9999.

Community Planning Group Recommendation - The College Area Community Council recommended approval of the proposed project on April 9, 2003, by a vote of 13-0-1 with three recommendations discussed within the body of this report (Attachment 13). These recommendations have been incorporated into the project design.

Other Recommendations - The College Community Redevelopment Project Area Committee indicated their support of the project at their February 4, 2003, meeting by a vote of 10-0-1, with no additional recommendations (Attachment 14).

Environmental Review – Mitigated Negative Declaration No. 6036 has been prepared for the project in accordance with the State of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. A Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program has been prepared and will be implemented to reduce potential impacts to biological and paleontological resources to below a level of significance.

Fiscal Impact – None with this action. Project costs are paid by the applicant through a deposit account.

Code Enforcement Impact – None with this action.

Housing Impact Statement - The project proposes 70 residential units on vacant land. According to the College Area Community Plan, the proposed project site is designated for high residential at a density of 45 to 75 dwelling units per net residential acre with emphasis on sorority housing development. Based on the 1.56-acre project site, 70 to 117 dwelling units would be allowed. As proposed, the project meets the recommended density range in the community plan. Although the Inclusionary Housing Ordinance does not specifically address student housing development projects, the proposed project does provide housing for a specific population with limited income and typically supported by various financial aid programs.

BACKGROUND

The Sorority Row project site is located on the west side of College Avenue between College Place and Cresita Drive, just south of Montezuma Road, within the College Area Community Plan (Attachment 1). The project site is located within the RM-3-9 zone, the Core Subarea of the College Community Redevelopment Project Master Project Plan, and the Parking Impact Overlay Zone. The RM-3-9 zone is a multi-family residential zone permitting a base density of one unit per 600 square feet of lot area. The subject site is 67,954 square feet. The College Area Community Plan and the College Community Redevelopment Project Master Project Plan designate the site for sorority use (Attachment 5). The project site is not located within the Multiple Habitat Planning Area (MHPA), but does contain steep hillsides and is thus subject to the regulations for Environmentally Sensitive Lands – steep hillsides.

The site is currently vacant. An existing 8-foot-wide sewer and drainage easement bisects the property in an east-west direction, with a man-hole at the virtual center of the property. The site is surrounded by fraternity and sorority use to the north, and single-family residences to the south, west and across College Boulevard to the east.

The proposed sorority development project requires the following discretionary actions:

1. A Planned Development Permit to address the requirements of the College Community Redevelopment Project Master Project Plan (MPP) and for proposed deviations;
2. A Site Development Permit for encroachment into environmentally sensitive lands and for the Community Plan Implementation Overlay Zone (Area B);
3. A Conditional Use Permit for the sorority use;
4. A Tentative Map for the proposed condominiums; and
5. An Easement Vacation for the vacation of the existing sewer and drainage easement.

The project is subject to a Process 5 City Council decision due to the request for the easement vacation.

The College Area Community Plan (CACP) was last amended by the City Council on August 3, 2002, and reflects the long range goals of this site being devoted to sorority use (Attachment 5). The CACP references the College Community Redevelopment Project (CCRP), and requires the creation of a Master Project Plan to implement the College Area Community Plan and the College Community Redevelopment Project, as well as aid in the redevelopment of five subareas surrounding San Diego State University (Attachment 4). The Master Project Plan (MPP) for the College Community Redevelopment Project was approved by the City Council on October 12, 1993. This project site is within the “Core Subarea” of the CCRP (Attachment 4). The Core Subarea Design Manual was adopted by the City Council on August 12, 1997. Both the MPP and Core Subarea Design Manual contain guidelines and regulations regarding the development of this project site.

DISCUSSION

Project Description:

The project proposes the construction of a new sorority development that would consist of five new chapter houses and 65 sorority units constructed above a two-level subterranean parking structure on a vacant site. Existing sororities within the SDSU community will be relocating into these new buildings upon completion. The amount of units per chapter house and live-out structure would range between one-bedroom and four-bedroom units, each having one or more beds per bedroom, with a breakdown as follows:

- Chapter House 1: 5 one-bedroom units, 4 two-bedroom units, and 4 four-bedroom units

- (with a total of 40 beds).
- Chapter House 2: 2 one-bedroom units, 2 three-bedroom units, and 6 four-bedroom units (with a total of 34 beds).
- Chapter House 3: 5 one-bedroom units, 4 two-bedroom units, and 4 four-bedroom units (with a total of 40 beds).
- Chapter House 4: 4 two-bedroom units and 4 four-bedroom units (with a total of 30 beds).
- Chapter House 5: 4 two-bedroom units and 4 four-bedroom units (with a total of 30 beds).
- Live-out Units: 4 one-bedroom units and 11 two-bedroom units (with a total of 41 beds).

The Chapter Houses and Live-Out unit building would be four-story buildings constructed above a two-level, subterranean parking structure. Approximately 23,000 cubic yards of earth would be excavated, approximately 27 feet deep. Retaining walls would be constructed along the north, south and east sides of the property to accommodate the new structure. The Chapter Houses and Live-Out unit buildings will total approximately 100,015 square feet in area.

Other project features include a pool and spa area available for all sorority residents, hardscape and landscape improvements, the undergrounding of all utilities abutting the project frontage, public right-of-way improvements, and a 4.5-foot public right-of-way dedication along College Avenue to provide a 10'-0" curb-to-property line distance.

The project is located along Metropolitan Transit System Routes 115 and 936 and is well served by numerous bus routes in close proximity. Nearest the property, a southbound bus stop exists at the corner of Cresita Drive and College Avenue, and a northbound bus stop exists at the corner of Pontiac Street.

The proposed use was anticipated within the College Community Redevelopment Project Environmental Impact Report. Traffic information was provided that indicated the project impacts alone would be less than significant. The project is expected to generate approximately 217 average daily trips (ADT), including 4 AM in-bound trips, 13 AM out-bound trips, 15 PM in-bound trips, and 7 PM out-bound trips. There are 175 off-street parking spaces proposed within the subterranean parking structure. Only 156 of those spaces are required for the proposed project. While the remaining 19 spaces will be available for the project, it is possible a request may be made to allocate them to potential off-site future uses.

The site is approximately 0.8 miles from the City of San Diego's Fire Station 10, which is located at 62nd and Acorn Streets. The response time from this station would be approximately 2.5 minutes. Also, this property is located within the City Police Department's Mid-City Division, which has a report average response time of 6.0 minutes. This proposed development would not affect these response times as this area is already served by these public services.

Planned Development Permit/Site Development Permit/Conditional Use Permit

As indicated above, the site is located within the College Community Redevelopment Project Area. This document discusses the need for a Planned Development Permit for any use, and a Conditional Use Permit for a sorority use. The requested Planned Development Permit has incorporated the requested deviations, as allowed through that process. The Site Development Permit is required due to the proposed encroachment into steep hillsides exceeding the maximum allowable, as allowed through that process. The Land Development Code requires sites within the Community Plan Implementation Overlay Zone (Area B) to obtain a Site Development Permit to ensure those requirements within the community plan have been met.

Deviations

As allowed through the Planned Development Permit and Site Development Permit processes, the applicant is requesting three deviations to accommodate the proposed development, all of which are supported by staff and the community.

The first deviation is for a front yard setback of 0 feet for 100 percent of the building envelope where a minimum of 10 feet for 50 percent of the building envelope and 20 feet for the remaining 50 percent of the building envelope is permitted, per SDMC Section 131.0443.f.1. In order to accommodate the required street dedication of an additional 4.5 feet along College Avenue, and to address the neighbor concerns regarding the proximity of the proposed structures to the existing single-family homes at the rear of the property, the applicant is requesting the front setback deviation.

The second deviation is regarding the encroachment into steep hillsides. The project will encroach into the development area by 87% where a maximum of 25% is allowed per SDMC Section 143.0142.a.2. This section specifies that “steep hillsides shall be preserved in their natural state, except that development is permitted in steep hillsides if necessary to achieve a maximum development area of 25 percent of the premises.” As discussed within the required findings, the site is completely surrounded by developed sites, and the anticipated use for this property in the policy documents is for high residential density and sorority use. The property would not be able to accommodate this anticipated use if the proposed encroachment were not allowed.

The third deviation is to permit retaining walls to exceed the maximum height allowed. The project includes retaining walls proposed to exceed the maximum 12 feet total height allowed within the south side setback area. The proposal includes two walls in this setback which will total approximately 17.25 feet in height. The support for this deviation has its roots in the support for the two previous deviations.

Tentative Map

The applicant is requesting a Tentative Map to construct up to 70 condominium units. The applicant's proposal includes dividing the project into eight components for the condominium plan: five individually- owned Chapter Houses and three apartment buildings owned by the San Diego State University Foundation, which necessitates the condominium association. The balance of the site (common area) will be owned by the to-be-formed Homeowners' Association.

Sewer and Drainage Easement Vacation

The project proposes the vacation of an existing sewer and drainage easement that bisects the property from east to west. Real Estates Assets staff has determined that the City does not have a monetary interest in this easement and that the vacation can move forward. Upon approval of the project, all proposed drainage for the property will be private and subject to approval by the City Engineer, as conditioned within the Tentative Map and Easement Vacation Resolution (Attachment 10).

Sewer Group Job 725 is planning to replace/upgrade the existing sewer system located within and adjacent to the proposed Sorority Row project. The existing sewer system located north and south of the Sorority Row project flows through an existing 8" easement sewer main in the middle of the Sorority Row property. In order to abandon this existing 8" easement sewer main and unencumber the Sorority Row property, the flows will be re-directed to a new sewer main which will be installed by the developer in College Place, College Avenue, Cresita Drive, and through a side yard easement connecting back into an existing easement sewer main located east of Tierra Baja Way. The applicant's engineer has been coordinating the proposed sewer work for this project with the City's Engineering and Capital Projects Department, Water & Sewer Facilities to ensure that both parties are in agreement on the design of both sewer systems.

The project area is located near the Paseo, which is one of the Pilot Village projects initiated by the City Council. The Paseo is located on the north side of Montezuma Road, at College Avenue. This project is currently under review by City staff. The Paseo proposal includes a large-scale, mixed-use, transit-oriented project incorporating parking, commercial, and housing elements.

Community Plan Analysis:

According to the College Area Community Plan, the proposed project site is designated for high density residential development at a density of 45 to 75 dwelling units per net residential acre. Based on the project area of 1.56 acres, 70 to 117 dwelling units would be allowed (Attachment 3). With a proposal to develop 70 sorority residential units, the proposed project meets the recommended density range of the community plan. The proposed project also meets the recommendations in the community plan's Housing Element for the creation of additional student housing within close proximity of the San Diego State University campus and developing

strong pedestrian orientation between the university campus, new student residential, and existing commercial.

Given the lack of neighborhood parks and recreational areas in the College Area, on-site recreational facilities proposed with new multi-family residential projects will help meet the immediate recreational needs of residents. The provision of a swimming pool, spa, and various courtyards for passive and active recreational functions within the proposed Sorority Row project implements the community plan's recommendation for incorporating on-site recreational facilities. Further, as the residents are students of the university, they also have the opportunity to use the various on-campus recreational facilities as well.

In keeping with encouraging a more community-oriented campus rather than a commuter campus, the proposed project meets recommendations for enhancing pedestrian orientation. The proposed project's orientation along College Avenue allows for direct and identifiable access from the street and into the development. Pedestrian circulation and orientation is further enhanced within the project through corridors that are furnished with small water features, shade producing trees, courtyards, a multi-purpose plaza, and enhanced decorative paving. In addition to promoting and enhancing pedestrian activity, the proposed project provides secure bicycle storage areas within the underground parking structure to accommodate bicycling as an alternative form of transportation.

According to the Urban Design Element of the community plan, the community's natural hillsides, canyons, and vegetation are important assets that should be protected and preserved in new development and utilize existing topography. In meeting this recommendation, the proposed buildings of the project have been developed to follow the contours of the site to reduce visual impacts to surrounding neighbors and integrate with the community. Additionally, the uses of flat roofs for the apartment buildings are proposed to minimize the height of buildings as they slope downhill. Sloped roofs are utilized for the Chapter Houses to provide interest and variation throughout the interior space of the development site.

Environmental Analysis:

A Mitigated Negative Declaration (Project No. 6036) has been prepared for this project in accordance with State of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. The proposed project includes mitigation measures to offset potential impacts to the environment in the areas of biological and paleontological resources.

As discussed within the Mitigated Negative Declaration, the project site is not a part of or adjacent to the City of San Diego's Multi-Habitat Planning Area. However, there are sensitive habitats on and adjacent to the subject property, and there a biological survey was required. While no narrow endemic plant or animal species were observed onsite, the project was determined to be covered predominantly with non-native, invasive vegetation with a 0.10-acre patch of disturbed Diegan coastal sage scrub, which is a Tier II common upland habitat. The project site also contains approximately 1.24 acres of non-native grassland. The implementation

of the proposed project will permanently impact these resources and would be considered significant and require mitigation in accordance with the mitigation ratios required by the City of San Diego. The Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program requires that these impacts be mitigated through either off-site land acquisition within the MHPA, off-site land acquisition in an approved conservation mitigation bank, or payment into the city's Habitat Acquisition Fund.

The project is underlain by the Mission Valley geologic formation, which has produced very rare marine fossils and has been assigned a high resource potential for fossils. The proposed grading for this project exceeds the City's thresholds of significance for potential impacts to paleontological resources. Implementation of the Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program will ensure paleontological monitoring will occur during ground excavations exceeding ten feet in depth and will respond to this environmental concern.

In addition to the above issue areas, historical resources (archaeology), hydrology, and water quality were considered during the environmental review of the project and were determined not to be significant.

Project-Related Issues:

Community Input

The proposed project has been the subject of several community meetings with both the College Community Project Area Committee (PAC – the communication link between the Redevelopment Agency and the community) and the College Area Community Council (CACC - the recognized community planning group).

The PAC has indicated their support of the project at their February 4, 2003, meeting by a vote of 10-0-1, with no additional recommendations. The minutes of the PAC indicate their pleasure with the applicant for the community presentations and workshops which led to the design of the Sorority Row project.

The CACC recommended approval of the proposed project on April 9, 2003, by a vote of 13-0-1 with a few recommendations. The recommendations included that ingress and egress to the project be allowed off College Avenue in both the north and south directions and not allowed from College Place; that sufficient width be maintained to allow vehicular access to the sewer in the southwest corner of the property; and that tandem parking would be acceptable to meet the City's parking requirements. The project has incorporated all of these recommendations into the proposed design.

Transportation Issues

The College Community Redevelopment Project Master Project Plan discusses the potential of providing access to this project site from College Place to the north. Implementation of this access would necessitate crossing private property, also improved with sorority/fraternity use. It

was based on the strong recommendation from the PAC and the CACC that the project was designed to provide access from College Avenue instead. These groups indicated their desire to have this access to avoid potential left turn issues from College Place due to its proximity to the intersection of College Avenue and Montezuma Road. The community indicated their position that access from College Avenue would provide a safer left-turn in order to prevent traffic circulating in the neighborhoods, especially on Cresita Drive, and to avoid u-turns at the Pontiac Street intersection with College Avenue.

Critical Project Features to Consider During Substantial Conformance Review

- INTENSITY OF DEVELOPMENT: No additional units may be permitted.
- PARKING/CIRCULATION: Number of parking spaces may not be decreased; ingress/egress to the site and College Avenue striping are significant items that must conform to LDR-Transportation Development requirements.

Conclusion:

In summary, staff finds the project consistent with the recommended land use, design guidelines, and development standards in effect for this site per the adopted College Area Community Plan, College Community Redevelopment Project Master Project Plan, Core Subarea Design Manual, the RM-3-9 Zone (with the exception of the deviations requested). Draft conditions of approval have been prepared for the project (Attachments 10 and 11) and Findings required to approve the project are included in the draft resolutions (Attachments 10 and 12).

ALTERNATIVES

1. **Recommend** to the City Council approval of Planned Development Permit No. 142191, Site Development Permit No. 9998, Conditional Use Permit No. 9997, Tentative Map No. 9996, and Easement Vacation No. 9999, with modifications.
2. **Recommend** to the City Council denial of Planned Development Permit No. 142191, Site Development Permit No. 9998, Conditional Use Permit No. 9997, Tentative Map No. 9996, and Easement Vacation No. 9999, if the findings required to approve the project cannot be affirmed.

Respectfully submitted,

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ESCOBAR-ECK/MAS

Attachments:

1. Aerial Photograph
2. Community Plan Land Use Map
3. Recommended Residential Densities
4. Redevelopment Subareas
5. Proposed Land Use – University & Redevelopment Area
6. Project Location Map
7. Project Data Sheet
8. Tentative Map
9. Project Plans
10. Draft Map Conditions and Subdivision Resolution
11. Draft Permit with Conditions
12. Draft Resolution with Findings
13. College Area Community Council Recommendation
14. College Community Redevelopment Project Area Committee Recommendation
15. Ownership Disclosure Statement
16. Project Chronology