



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

DATE ISSUED: April 6, 2006 REPORT NO. PC-06-127

ATTENTION: Planning Commission  
Agenda of April 13, 2006

SUBJECT: Initiation of an amendment to the Progress Guide and General Plan and the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan and Local Coastal Program to redesignate an approximately 17-acre site from School/Institution to Low-Medium Density Residential with a density range of 10-15 dwelling units per acre. PTS 95499

OWNER/  
APPLICANT: Shea Homes, L.P.

### SUMMARY

Issues – Should the Planning Commission INITIATE an amendment to the Progress Guide and General Plan and the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan pursuant to Municipal Code Section 122.0103? The amendment has been requested to redesignate an approximately 17-acre site from School/Institution to Low-Medium Density Residential with a density range of 10-15 dwelling units per acre.

Staff's Recommendation – INITIATE the plan amendment process.

Community Planning Group Recommendation – On March 8, 2006, the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Planning Group voted 14-0-0 to recommend approval of the initiation of the general/community plan amendment process, and voted 9-5-0 to recommend Low Density Residential for the site (see Attachment 1).

Environmental Impact – If initiated, the proposed plan amendment and future discretionary actions will be subject to environmental review.

Fiscal Impact – None. Costs associated with processing this application would be reimbursed by the applicant.

Housing Affordability Impact – The Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan designates the proposal site as School/Institution. The existing land use designation and zoning do not allow multifamily residential development on the property. If redesignated to Low-Medium Density, the site could accommodate up to 255 dwelling units. In addition, the applicant has indicated a desire to provide a range of housing products, with the inclusionary housing on-site, which would help the City address its shortage of affordable housing stock at a time when the City Council has determined that the City is in a Housing State of Emergency.

**This initiation request does not constitute an endorsement of the project proposal. A staff recommendation will be developed once the project has been fully analyzed. This action will allow the staff analysis to proceed.**

## BACKGROUND

The subject area of the proposed amendment, an approximately 17-acre site, is located in the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Planning Area (see Attachment 2). Otay Mesa-Nestor is an urbanized community bounded by the Tijuana River Valley on the south, Imperial Beach to the west, Chula Vista to the north, and Otay Mesa to the east.

The Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan designates the subject area School/Institution (see Attachment 3). Currently, Marian Catholic High School occupies the 17-acre site (see Attachment 4). The approximately 700-student high school site contains 27 classrooms and labs, a library/media center, athletic fields, football stadium, and parking lot. Surrounding uses include a mixture of single-family and multifamily dwelling units to the west and north, an elementary school and commercial center to the east, and a community park to the south.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of San Diego is currently constructing a larger replacement facility in the Eastlake community of Chula Vista which is scheduled to open in August of 2007. The Guadalupe Center, located in the northeast corner of the school property site along 18<sup>th</sup> Street, is proposed to remain and includes an auditorium, chapel, offices, kitchen, and dormitory as support uses for St. Charles Church and Elementary School across 18<sup>th</sup> Street. The applicant, Shea Homes, is proposing residential development on the 17-acre site. In requesting a Low-Medium Residential designation, the applicant is considering a mixture of housing products which would include clustered, row and single-family units with an overall density of 15 dwelling units to the acre.

During the 1997 community plan update, one of the prevailing issues identified was the general lack of identity and strong community core. The objectives of Topic 3 of the Otay Mesa-Nestor Plan, entitled Housing, recommend the maintenance of planned residential land use intensities to ensure conservation of neighborhood character. The character of the proposed amendment site within the Egger Highlands neighborhood is a mixture of single-family and multifamily dwelling units anchored by the South Bay/Eggers Community Park, the Coronado Square Commercial Center, churches, and both private and public schools. Land use designations surrounding the site include Low Density Residential (5- 10 du/nra), Low-Medium Residential (10- 15 du/nra), Medium Density Residential (15- 30 du/nra), Park, and Neighborhood Commercial. The reuse

of the school site with residential units could help revitalize the neighborhood through timely development of property standing vacant or underutilized.

The proposed amendment was introduced as an information item at the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Planning Group's meeting of February 8, 2006. The applicant returned for an advisory recommendation at the March 8, 2006 meeting. The planning group voted 14-0-0 to recommend the initiation of a plan amendment, and voted 9-5-0 to recommend a designation of Low Density Residential at 5- 10 du/nra. The prevailing side for the Low Density Residential designation vote voiced concerns regarding the proposed density range, traffic, and the perception that Otay Mesa-Nestor community is in need of more market-rate housing. The Planning Department is aware of the group's concerns, but believes the site's location is better suited for the Low-Medium Density range (10- 15 du/nra) with its proximity to transit, parks, schools, and commercial uses.

The most recent amendment to the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan occurred in 2003. The River Estates Project redesignated approximately 2.5 acres from Park/Greenway to Medium Residential. The River Estates site is located east of the Marian High School site and along Hollister Avenue.

## DISCUSSION

Before a community plan amendment can be initiated, Section 122.0104 of the Municipal Code requires that any one of three initial criteria or all four supplemental criteria specified in the code must be met. The Planning Department does not believe that any of the following three initial criteria can be met:

- (1) **The amendment is appropriate due to a mapping or textural error or, omission made when the original land use plan or local coastal program was adopted or during subsequent amendments;**
- (2) **Denial of initiation would jeopardize the public health, safety or general welfare;**
- (3) **The amendment is appropriate due to a material change in circumstances, since the adoption of a land use plan or local coastal program, whereby denial of initiation would result in a hardship to the applicant by denying any reasonable use of the subject real property.**

The Planning Department does, however, believe that all of the following supplemental criteria can be met:

- (1) **The proposed land use plan amendment is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Progress Guide and General Plan and the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan.**

The proposed general/community plan amendment would allow for residential development on a site currently designated as School/Institution. The proposed amendment would help implement the goals and policies of the Progress Guide and General Plan, the Strategic Framework Element, and the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan.

Housing goals in the Progress Guide and General Plan include the availability of adequate sites for the development of a variety of housing types for all income levels and an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of low- and moderate-income households. The Strategic Framework Element of the General Plan calls for the provision of a sufficient range of housing and an improvement of housing affordability throughout the City. If approved, the amendment would allow for residential development at a range that would be compatible with the surrounding area and could be affordable in nature. The applicant anticipates developing the site with different product types that include clustered, row, and single-family homes that would be affordable in nature and would help provide a range of housing type in the Otay Mesa-Nestor community planning area.

The Progress Guide and General Plan Urban Design Element's goals for improving the neighborhood environment and increasing personal safety, comfort, pride and opportunity could be implemented through the development of both single-family and multifamily dwelling units with eyes on the street and homeownership opportunities. The Strategic Framework Element recommends maximizing the use of existing urbanized areas accessible to transit and protecting the community character through sensitive infill. Further recommendations include the provision of a diversity of housing types and fostering a more vital, interactive, and secure community. The proposed amendment would help fulfill the recommendations through the infill development of single-family and multifamily dwelling units on a soon-to-be vacated site which is serviced by public transit, park, schools, and community-serving commercial.

The proposed amendment would help implement the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan's vision to provide a wide range of housing opportunities in well-maintained neighborhoods linked to adequate community facilities and services. If initiated, the amendment would allow development of both single-family and multifamily dwelling units in a neighborhood with proximity to schools, transit, park, and commercial services on soon-to-be vacated property.

While the proposed general/community plan amendment conforms to many of the goals and objectives of the Progress Guide and General Plan, the Strategic Framework Element, and the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan, the Planning Department acknowledges that the community group recommended a lower density range for the proposed amendment. Given that the proposed amendment is consistent with a number of goals and objectives as mentioned above, staff recommends that this supplemental criterion be considered fulfilled for the purposes of this initiation process, with the understanding that further analysis of

the appropriate density range for the site would be considered if the community plan amendment is initiated.

**(2) The proposed land use plan amendment appears to offer a public benefit to the Community or City.**

The potential benefit of the proposed land use amendment to the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan is that it would allow for the addition of residential development on a site where residential development has previously been precluded. The proposed amendment would allow for the development of housing stock at a density range comparable to surrounding development which could help maintain the neighborhood character within the Otay Mesa-Nestor community area. Infill development such as this could provide housing of an affordable nature within the San Diego region, at a time when the City of San Diego is searching for areas that can accommodate additional residential units. In addition, the proposed plan amendment would provide an efficient use of the site by locating residential uses in close proximity to commercial and community-serving uses.

**(3) Public services appear to be available to serve the proposed increase in density or intensity of use.**

Otay Mesa-Nestor is an urbanized community and all needed public services are available in the community. If the plan amendment is initiated, analysis of public services and facilities would be conducted with the review of the plan amendment.

**(4) City staff is available to process the proposed land use plan amendment without any work being deferred on General Fund supported programs or ongoing plan updates.**

Staff is available to process this amendment request without delaying General Fund programs or ongoing plan updates, as the Planning Department's work program includes staff time for non-General Fund development projects. However, delays in processing the plan amendment could occur based on staff levels and workload. The costs associated with processing this amendment will be paid for by the applicant.

As outlined above, the proposed plan amendment meets all the supplemental initiation criteria; therefore, the Planning Department staff recommends the proposed amendment to the Progress Guide and General Plan and the Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan be initiated.

The following land use issues have been identified with the initiation request. If initiated, these issues, as well as others that may be identified, will be analyzed and evaluated through the general/community plan amendment review process:

- The appropriate land use designation, density range, and zoning;
- The compatibility of multifamily development with adjacent residential and commercial development;
- The impact of potential residential development on public services and facilities;
- The evaluation of any traffic impacts associated with the addition of residential development on the site;
- The availability of transit;
- Housing availability and affordability;
- Walkability and pedestrian connectivity.

Although staff believes that the proposed amendment meets the necessary supplemental criteria for initiation, staff has not fully reviewed the applicant’s proposal. Therefore, by initiating this general/community plan amendment, neither staff nor the Planning Commission is committed to recommend in favor or denial of the proposed amendment.

Respectfully submitted,

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 Program Manager  
 Planning Department

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 Senior Planner  
 Planning Department

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Attachments:

1. Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Planning Group draft March minutes
2. Otay Mesa-Nestor Vicinity Map
3. Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan Land Use Map
4. Aerial Photo
5. Ownership Disclosure Statement