

# DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

County of  
EL DORADO

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## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** February 22, 2012

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Lawrence W. Appel, Deputy Director of Planning Services

**SUBJECT:** AZ05-0002/PD06-0031/Mercy Housing  
Discussion of Access to Site  
Revised Findings and Conditions

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### **Background:**

On March 20, 2007, the Board of Supervisors heard a request of Mercy Housing to amend the General Plan land use designation from Medium Density Residential to Multifamily Residential and to approve a preliminary development plan for a site located off Runnymede Lane near the intersection of U.S. Highway 50 and El Dorado Road. The applications were continued to April 10, 2007, in order for the applicant and staff to review the adequacy of the access, provide more information regarding the availability and need for more MFR-designated land in the area, and to provide additional time for the Board members to consider the request.

### **Discussion:**

Multifamily Land Use Designation – During the previous hearing, the public raised a concern that there is a sufficient amount of multifamily designated land in the Diamond Springs/El Dorado area, and it is inappropriate to create more such land in this area. As identified in the 2004 General Plan Draft EIR, there is a total of 560 acres of land (both already developed as well as vacant) in the Diamond Springs market area designated for multifamily (Table 3-5. Pg.3-29). As a total number of acres, this is the highest for any market area in the County. For comparison, Cameron Park has 531 acres, El Dorado Hills has 366, and Pollock Pines has 153. However, much of that acreage is developed in lower density mobile home parks (China Garden and Mother Lode Drive areas) or is already developed in single family homes (El Dorado Road south of the project site and in the historic town centers of Diamond Springs and El Dorado.) That leaves two larger areas appropriate for future multifamily development. These are the areas west of El Dorado on Pleasant Valley Road, east of the “Y”, and south of Diamond Springs. This land has been designated multifamily since the adoption of the area plan in the mid 1970s. Yet there has been very little interest in developing this land at densities that would support a more affordable housing type. In fact, most of potential developers that staff has met with regarding

parts of these areas want to develop at a much lower density, primarily due to site constraints such as oak tree canopy, steep slopes, and wetlands or streams. Other constraints include the lack of readily available infrastructure at some sites and the distance to Highway 50. Given the fact that Mercy Housing, one of the few organizations willing to develop affordable housing in the County, has invested in this project demonstrates that the proposed site, while having some topographical challenges and needing some infrastructure improvements, shows that the site can be developed at a density of ten units per acre from both a physical constraint and financial feasibility standpoint.

El Dorado County is in need of additional housing for people of moderate and lower incomes. Based on the 2004 Housing Element, more than two thirds (6,819 dwelling units) of the housing that was to be developed between 2001 and 2008 needed to be in the affordable range. The County has been unable to attain this goal, and the recently issued Regional Housing Needs Allocations for the next Housing Element update from the California Department of Housing and Community Development shows that the need is even higher. The total number of new housing units in the County is expected to increase for the allocation period from almost 10,000 to over 15,000, and the affordable component is over 11,000 dwelling units. This is a significant increase and represents a serious challenge to the County to house its fair share of families with lower and moderate income levels.

Access – A second issue raised by the Board is a concern that access to the site is inadequate for emergency purposes, specifically the length of the dead end access from El Dorado Road to the site. The new road that would be constructed to the apartment complex from Runnymede is approximately 900 feet long. The intersection of this road and Runnymede back to El Dorado Road is almost 600 additional feet, for a total of nearly 1,500 feet. The Design and Improvement Standards Manual provides standards for the development of roads and other improvements, primarily for parcel maps and subdivisions, but which have also been applied to other types of development projects. The dead end road standard is 500 feet, except where a road serves less than 24 parcels and specified additional improvements are made, not to exceed 2,640 feet (Vol. II, Sec. 3.A.12.) The primary concern raised was that if a fire were to come up the hill emergency egress by the residents of the 70 units would be constrained.

Staff met with a representative of the Diamond Springs-El Dorado Fire Protection District and the applicants to see if alternative access could be developed. However, due to physical constraints, such alternatives are extremely limited. There may be a possibility to provide an emergency access route connection to the mobile home park to the south or along the southern boundary of the undeveloped lot owned by the applicant/property owner and connect to a residential street to the southwest. But neither of these is an ideal solution and will in most likelihood run into opposition from the residents whose neighborhoods these would run through.

There are some differences with this project from that which the standards normally apply to. This site will be fully developed with structures, parking, and commercial landscaping rather than the wildland vegetation more prominent in single family residential developments. On site, there would be multiple routes to get back to the main access road, all of the structures would be constructed of fire resistant materials, and numerous fire hydrants would be installed along with sprinkler systems in the buildings. The access road is proposed to be constructed with a width of 36 feet.

The Fire District representative believes that there would be sufficient improvements to this site, which would be different from that of a parcel map or subdivision, to find that there is adequate access and emergency egress along with other fire safety measures to support the project. However, due to the number of other types of calls (medical emergency) that are typically received from multifamily housing, the District requests that an additional condition be added to ensure participation in the community financing district (CFD) that the District is trying to establish. This will assure there is adequate funding to support fire prevention and suppression, and emergency medical services in the District.

### **Summary:**

The County is in need of areas that are both physically suitable and financially feasible to develop affordable housing. The proposed project will provide such development which is becoming increasingly in demand as housing prices exceed the ability to afford them for many people. While the access to the site is not ideal, based on the proposed improvements, the fire district has determined that the proposed 36-foot wide road leading to the site provides sufficient access and emergency egress for the residents who would be living in the project. Below are additional proposed findings and a new condition of approval.

### **Additional Findings**

- 2.2 The State of California through its Department of Housing and Community Development has determined that there is a need for 6,819 units of affordable housing that should be provided to meet the 2001-2008 Regional Housing Needs Allocation as identified in the 2004 Housing Element of the General Plan (Table HO-24). The 2007 Regional Housing Needs Allocation for El Dorado County for the 2008 Housing Element update has substantially increased, creating a higher demand for more multifamily designated land.
- 2.3 Designating and zoning land for multifamily housing is one of the most efficient means to provide the opportunity for new affordable housing to be developed.
- 2.4 The proposed amendment would provide and incremental increase in housing opportunities and bring the County closer to compliance with its Housing Element.

### **New Condition**

50. Prior to recordation of the final map, the applicant shall annex the development into a Community Facilities District (CFD) for the provision of public services permitted under Government Code § 53313, including fire suppression services, emergency medical services, and fire prevention activities and other services for which proceedings are under consideration, and as such, shall be subject to the special tax approved with the formation of such CFD with the developments inclusion or annexation into the CFD.