



OFFICE OF THE
MAYOR

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March 28, 2007

Supervisor Roberta MacGlashan
County of Sacramento
700 H Street, Suite 2450
Sacramento CA 95814

Re: Proposed Orangevale Cohousing Development

Dear Supervisor MacGlashan:

I understand that you are considering a cohousing project in Orangevale. The City of Chico approved a similar project in 1995, so I am writing to inform you of our experience and to express my support for the cohousing concept.

The Chico Cohousing project was proposed in a mostly developed area, surrounded on two sides by existing single family residences at somewhat lower density, on one side by large semi-rural lots, and on the fourth side by open land which was not yet proposed for development.

The Chico project's neighbors initially expressed considerable opposition to the proposal, presenting a petition with over 100 signatures. Much of the opposition was based on misunderstandings and false assumptions about the nature of the proposal. Some thought it would be low-income housing, threatening their property values. Others feared it was some type of commune, because the families were working together to develop it. Many objected to the density. However, it is my experience that those fears were not based on reality.

Once the details of the proposal became clear, and after the neighbors' concerns were dealt with in the careful design of our project, the rational opponents were largely satisfied, and our Council approved it. Now that it is built, there is no more opposition.

I refer to the Chico Cohousing project as "our project" because we are very proud of it. The neighbors and other Chico residents seem fascinated with the beautiful design and the opportunities it presents for a more cohesive, attractive, safe neighborhood, with increasing property values.

Property values were a major concern of our project's neighbors. However, Chico Cohousing's prices range right around the Chico average. The high demand for these houses (which were mostly pre-sold and now rarely turn over) indicates strong resale value and a solid contribution to property values in the area. This has been the experience, also, with the cohousing projects in Davis, Sacramento, and the Bay Area, where values actually rise faster than the surrounding area.

The density issue was another concern with our Chico project. However, the amount of open space in cohousing projects (like most planned developments) is actually greater than the rest of the neighborhood, allowing for a more park-like atmosphere. Eliminating internal streets and parking was the biggest factor in creating more open space. This reduces the appearance and feel of density. However, there is much to be said for increasing densities, as called for by the City's General Plan, in order to minimize urban sprawl and to protect open space and farm land. Even with its density, our project has more play, garden, orchard, and shady spaces than any other nearby neighborhood.

Public services and traffic were other concerns here. However, the on-site recreational opportunities, shared facilities, shared child care, and some shared meals have reduced off-site travel, compared with standard housing. These amenities also reduce pressure on City parks, services, and streets. Our project's close proximity to the neighborhood elementary and junior high schools allows children to safely bike to school together (watching their daily "parade" is a real treat), which relieves local streets from the crush of traffic typically associated with parents driving their children to school. Car pooling to school is the norm during rainy weather.

Soon after our project was built, neighborhood opposition vanished, as the realities of this quiet and cohesive family setting became obvious. The residents have developed a strong sense of "neighborliness" and involvement with the broader community.

A surprise benefit of our cohousing "village" is that it has become a terrific community center for Chico, hosting children's parties, faculty and church meetings, and other wonderful events and meetings involving residents, and members of the community at large.

We are proud to have cohousing in Chico, and we look forward to more cohousing projects in the future. We encourage you to move in this worthwhile direction by approving Orangevale Cohousing. You are fortunate to have a group of families willing to take an active role in planning their own neighborhood and community. It will prove to be a model for other new development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andy Holcombe".

Andy Holcombe
Mayor, City of Chico

cc: Jon Luvaas, Chico Cohousing
Marty Maskall