



Orcutt Union School District

A School District CAN Turn Surplus Land into Much Needed Revenue!

Situation

As with many school districts across the State of California, Orcutt Union School District (“District”) has, and currently is, experiencing severe negative fiscal impacts due to the economic downturn. As such, the District decided to position a portion (9.53± acres) of their surplus property to be leased to a senior housing developer, which would provide a means of long-term revenue enhancement. This entailed revising portions of the Orcutt Community Plan, redesignating the site, and re-defining development standards for future development. The District contacted Oasis Associates, Inc. in 2004 for guidance through both the District’s and County of Santa Barbara’s processes to obtain the requisite entitlements.

Challenges

After we extensively reviewed the Orcutt Community Plan, an “action item” was found within the document stating that if an application was filed for 100 percent senior housing on the aforementioned portion of surplus property, the County should consider redesignating and rezoning the parcel. Although this planning document supported the senior housing project, many neighbors expressed concern regarding a higher density housing option in a predominately single family neighborhood. Specific community concerns included traffic generation, a 30 percent senior housing density bonus that could be applied pursuant to California Government Code §65915-65918, and using the property for purposes other than educational related activities.

Solutions

In order to properly address any neighborhood opposition to the project, our firm held numerous public outreach meetings within Orcutt, California. These meetings provided the opportunity to describe how appropriate design of the project was necessarily to maintain a compatible, cohesive, and attractive neighborhood. For example, the homes directly next to the adjacent residential street should be developed as single story homes, while the balance of the senior housing units themselves should be two stories in height, low profile, and screened to the greatest degree feasible. Throughout our thirty years of planning experience, we have perfected an effective way to conduct public outreach meetings, determine the appropriate level of information to be provided to neighbors so that they will feel comfortable expressing their comments and ultimately, with the development.

The information provided during the public outreach meetings was able to satisfy much of the original neighbor opposition, while any remaining concern was addressed to the greatest extent feasible in the project's application. Our diligent care to include the neighbors in the planning process from the beginning will ultimately reduce conflicts or controversy as the project nears completion.

Results

As of August 2011, the Draft Environmental Impact Report ("EIR") has been reviewed by the public and the EIR consultant is now preparing the Administrative Final EIR for the County to review.