

Supervisors approve appeal to allow housing construction

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The Del Norte County Board of Supervisors overturned a decision by the Planning Commission to allow a housing project to move forward.

By a 4-1 vote, supervisors approved an appeal by Nato Flores to allow on-site water detention rather than the required regulations that require stormwater to be moved off-site to a public road.

Taylor Carsley, a planner for the county, explained Flores wanted to build an on-site water retention pond in an effort to make the project financially viable. In October, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to reject Flores' request.

The commission had approved a use permit for the site in 2019, but was asked approve changes to the permit, which was denied.

Carsley explained to supervisors that county regulations require stormwater to be carried off-site. In this case, Flores had hired an engineering firm to come up with alternative of a retention pond.

"From an engineering standpoint, it seems the alternative does address the management of the 25-year storm, just as the off-site would," Carsley said. "It would provide a fairly large amount of houses in the area."

Flores has already built some homes in the area — one single-family home and eight bungalows. He wants to build an additional one-bedroom houses, which he would rent out.

The majority of supervisors seemed swayed by the need for new homes, especially lower-income housing.

“In this case, finding the balance to create houses in our community is extremely important,” Supervisor Chris Howard said. “I see no reason for us not to approve the application.”

Jerry and Rebecca Young, who own property next to the construction site, wrote a letter asking for the appeal to be denied. The Youngs said Flores has already cause some problems by taking down a fence that has not been replaced.

“Our concern with the drainage is his property is much higher than ours, and when it rains, it drops from his property to ours.”

The approved permit requires Flores to build a six-foot concrete fence, and he told supervisors he would do that.

“The fence was brought down because we needed to move it back to the proper property line,” Flores said. “We will replace it with a chain-link fence temporarily and construct a block fence.”

Flores also said the entire project was being built with permeable properties to allow water to soak into the ground. In addition, the engineering plan shows the water-retention pond would have less water leaving the property than it currently does.

While four supervisors voted in favor of the appeal, Supervisor Roger Gitlin was opposed.

“This is the second time our board of supervisors is overturning an appeal from our planning commission,” Gatlin said. “They are our appointees. This is a 4-0 vote, with one recusal. It’s kind of clear the four members have an opinion, and I don’t like, just on face value, overturning our designated appointees.”

Flores explained the construction at the site would be using two, 20-foot shipping containers for each home. Some work would be done off-site, but most would be done in place.

“They won’t look like shipping containers,” Flores said. “They will look like cottages. They’ll have windows and doors. They will be partially constructed in a factory, but they will be finished on site, so we will have local inspections. Even though they are modular units, they will look like they have siding on them.”

But Gitlin was not impressed.

“I’ve heard from a number of your neighbors, and they’re none too happy with the kind of construction you’re about to engage in,” he said. “While I certainly appreciate we do have a housing shortage, I’m not sure this is the answer.”

Board Chair Gerry Hemmingsen said he was in favor, pointing out the issue in front of the board was only about stormwater drainage.

“I don’t think we’re supposed to worry about how this thing is built, we’re talking about drainage,” Hemmingsen said. “He is just looking for an alternative that will make his units work better financially.”