

## **‘Pocket neighborhood’ passes planning commission**

**BY ALLISON JARRELL ARGUS-COURIER STAFF on August 22, 2014, 2:48PM08/22/2014**

The Petaluma Planning Commission demonstrated an unusual amount of praise last week for a proposed “pocket neighborhood” on the west side of town.

Keller Court Commons, proposed by developer Jim Soules and local architect Chris Lynch, is a 1.7-acre micro community of eight 2-bedroom detached homes, clustered around a shared courtyard. The development would be located at the intersection of West Street and Keller Street, just outside of the Oakhill-Brewster Historic District.

“What’s unique about these projects is that they are building a very charming community inside a community,” said Commissioner Gina Benedetti-Petnic. “This particular type of project, very cleverly, takes a potential infill site and maximizes its efficiency.”

Soules, who got his start as a Marin County planner before moving to the Northwest, has developed 78 homes within seven projects in the Seattle area, with a focus on compact infill housing. In 1988, he developed the first contemporary pocket neighborhood, Third Street Cottages, in the City of Langley on the Puget Sound. Soules’ work became nationally renowned, and has inspired a wave of interest in the compact model.

Soules moved to Petaluma in 2008, and about four years later he began planning Keller Court Commons, which will include eight houses that range from 1,300- to 1,500-square-feet each, with detached parking and a joint courtyard. Previous courtyards Soules has designed have been a catalyst for community building, with weekly potlucks and other events in the shared space.

Since Petaluma development is confined by the city’s urban growth boundary, Benedetti-Petnic said it’s important for developers to focus on community minded and environmentally sound housing. Soules’ developments often attract single occupants or couples, which, he said, represent an important demographic since 60 percent of U.S. households are one- and two-person.

City Councilmember Kathy Miller, who serves as the planning commission liaison, said she was impressed with the project’s layout.

“It’s certainly a very cool concept, and I’m glad to see it come into Petaluma,” Miller said.

Commissioner Jennifer Pierre added that the project is well thought-out and respectful of the lot’s neighbors, as well as the city’s zoning ordinances and general plan. She noted that the proposed development is also less dense than what was originally zoned for the property.

Benedetti-Petnic agreed the with positive comments from the other commissioners, applauding Soules for the creativity, sensitivity and responsibility he has demonstrated with his other projects.

“I would probably go a step further and say, I don’t know that I’ve ever been excited about a project,” Benedetti-Petnik said. “This is just exciting. It is a brilliant concept.”

Keller Court Commons received approval of four resolutions at the Aug. 12 planning commission meeting, including recommendations that the city council approve a zoning map amendment and a tentative subdivision map. With three commissioners absent, the commission voted unanimously to pass each resolution.

The Historic and Cultural Preservation Committee also approved a recommendation to designate the Lundholm/Patocchi residence, an 1897 era Queen Anne farmhouse at 200 West St., as a local historic landmark. Soules said the house will be taken care of with a new foundation and removal of lead paint.

The Petaluma Planning Commission demonstrated an unusual amount of praise last week for a proposed “pocket neighborhood” on the west side of town.

Keller Court Commons, proposed by developer Jim Soules and local architect Chris Lynch, is a 1.7-acre micro community of eight 2-bedroom detached homes, clustered around a shared courtyard. The development would be located at the intersection of West Street and Keller Street, just outside of the Oakhill-Brewster Historic District.

“What’s unique about these projects is that they are building a very charming community inside a community,” said Commissioner Gina Benedetti-Petnic. “This particular type of project, very cleverly, takes a potential infill site and maximizes its efficiency.”

Soules, who got his start as a Marin County planner before moving to the Northwest, has developed 78 homes within seven projects in the Seattle area, with a focus on compact infill housing. In 1988, he developed the first contemporary pocket neighborhood, Third Street Cottages, in the City of Langley on the Puget Sound. Soules’ work became nationally renowned, and has inspired a wave of interest in the compact model.

Soules moved to Petaluma in 2008, and about four years later he began planning Keller Court Commons, which will include eight houses that range from 1,300- to 1,500-square-feet each, with detached parking and a joint courtyard. Previous courtyards Soules has designed have been a catalyst for community building, with weekly potlucks and other events in the shared space.

Since Petaluma development is confined by the city’s urban growth boundary, Benedetti-Petnic said it’s important for developers to focus on community minded and environmentally sound housing. Soules’ developments often attract single occupants or couples, which, he said, represent an important demographic since 60 percent of U.S. households are one- and two-person.

City Councilmember Kathy Miller, who serves as the planning commission liaison, said she was impressed with the project’s layout.

“It’s certainly a very cool concept, and I’m glad to see it come into Petaluma,” Miller said.

Commissioner Jennifer Pierre added that the project is well thought-out and respectful of the lot’s neighbors, as well as the city’s zoning ordinances and general plan. She noted that the proposed development is also less dense than what was originally zoned for the property.

Benedetti-Petnic agreed the with positive comments from the other commissioners, applauding Soules for the creativity, sensitivity and responsibility he has demonstrated with his other projects.

“I would probably go a step further and say, I don’t know that I’ve ever been excited about a project,” Benedetti-Petnik said. “This is just exciting. It is a brilliant concept.”

Keller Court Commons received approval of four resolutions at the Aug. 12 planning commission meeting, including recommendations that the city council approve a zoning map amendment and a tentative subdivision map. With three commissioners absent, the commission voted unanimously to pass each resolution.

The Historic and Cultural Preservation Committee also approved a recommendation to designate the Lundholm/Patocchi residence, an 1897 era Queen Anne farmhouse at 200 West St., as a local historic landmark. Soules said the house will be taken care of with a new foundation and removal of lead paint.