

Habitat issue packs city council

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You could cut the tension with a knife.

Every couple of years there is a city council meeting that provides fireworks and thanks to a rezoning application, 2010 started off with a bang.

There were numbers presented, but it didn't help.

Attempts to alleviate concerns were to no avail.

In the end, council went ahead with the Habitat for Humanity development that has caused controversy from the beginning.

It was clear what the public wanted: a different area for the development that encourages breaking the cycle of poverty through home ownership.

It was clear everyone agreed on one thing: Habitat for Humanity is a worthwhile addition to the community, just not in an area with two schools, a seniors' residence and a soccer park.

It was also clear that council was severely split on the decision: two aldermen voted for it; two voted against it; two excused themselves from the vote; Mayor Linda Bruce was the deciding vote that gave HFH the go-ahead that could see construction start as early as July.

But what wasn't clear was what the real issue was.

Sure, residents voiced concerns over parking, traffic, loss of green space, property values, recreation space, safety and, in some cases, just general outrage that seemed to be directed at nobody one minute and everyone the next.

There were accusations of NIMBY, which stands for 'not in my backyard'.

It is the hardest to vocalize for fear of being insensitive, elitist or just generally miserable.

Some theorized that was the real issue, but no one would really say it, except for a select few who questioned what would happen with property values and safety around the schools.

The term "affordable housing" was shied away from because of social stigmas that attach negative attributes to the people that need help with housing.

No one would say that out loud, however.

In the end, residents attached their hopes of getting the proposal scrapped to traffic concerns and the alleged safety of their children around the roads.

While I'll admit, I'm interested to see how the area functions with two schools, a soccer field and another development directly adjacent to Ralph McCall School, it was a reach to attach the emotion and anger to the traffic.

With the absolute maximum of 57 units on this site (which has already been stated won't happen, it will be much lower) the increase in vehicles is negligible.

The fact is traffic issues are inherent to school sites no matter how many schools are there. The tri-school site deals with traffic. High schools deal with traffic. I even remember my elementary school way back when dealing with traffic.

While I hated having to walk two blocks to where my parents parked when they picked me up after school, I didn't exactly feel in danger like I was dodging cars in a real life version of Asteroid.

I made it. It's traffic. We're talking about traffic. We're talking about traffic. While we'd all love to eradicate traffic and keep every child out of harm's way, it's just not going to happen.

Traffic or affordable housing? The decision shouldn't even have been in question.

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