



## **OAKLAND: PLANNING COMMISSION APPROVES DEVELOPMENT AFFECTING RARE FLOWER**

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OAKLAND (BCN)

The Oakland Planning Commission has voted unanimously to uphold its previous approval of a housing development in the hills that environmentalists say will reduce the habitat of an endangered flower called the Presidio clarkia.

The small, lavender annual, which is protected under state and federal law, is known to exist only in a small section of the Oakland hills and a small area of the Presidio in San Francisco.

The four-home development on a steep 1.3-acre hillside on Crestmont Drive and Westfield Way was first approved by the Planning Commission last October and the Oakland City Council rejected an appeal by development opponents in January.

But the matter was returned to the Planning Commission at its meeting Wednesday night after the city's Ethics Commission said important documents related to the development weren't included in the agenda packet for the October meeting.

Ralph Kanz of Friends of Oakland's Endangered Species said if the development goes forward, it will lead to "the loss of almost 10 percent of the space in the world" for the rare plant, as the development will take up half an acre and the plant currently is only on a total of five acres in Oakland and San Francisco.

Kanz said the Planning Commission's vote not to review the matter "reinforces that Oakland is not a safe place for an endangered species to live."

He said that's because he believes the city has failed to enforce mitigation measures to protect the endangered flower during construction of two previously-approved projects in the same area.

Lech Naumovich, a conservation analyst for the California Native Plant Society, said he's "very disappointed" by the Planning Commission's vote because he fears that the Presidio clarkia "will become extinct under current practices."

Naumovich said, "The plant has its back against the wall and the city isn't helping."

He said, "Our main concern is that this will reduce the habitat for the area."

However, Oakland City Councilwoman Jean Quan, who represents the district where the proposed development is located, has said she supports the plan because she believes it represents a compromise that will allow the project to go forward and will still protect the flowers.

Dennis Woodruff, the owner of Andalucia Properties and the developer of the site, said today that, "I'm doing the best thing that ever happened" to the plant on the site.

Woodruff said if the property were left alone, the Presidio clarkia would be overtaken by non-native plants that are on the site, such as eucalyptus and acacia trees and various grasses.

Woodruff said only 10 percent of the flowers currently on the site will be affected by the development and 90 percent of the flowers "will survive and thrive" because of the preserve he's creating.

Woodruff said he initially hoped to build six homes on the site and city officials approved a subdivision for five homes, but he agreed to reduce the scope to only four homes, which he said "is costing me \$600,000" because he has fewer buildable lots.

Woodruff alleged that development opponents such as Friends of Oakland's Endangered Species and the California Native Plant Society are "saboteurs, idiots and fanatics."

Kanz said the project must still go before the California Fish and Game Department, which will determine if the development constitutes "a taking of an endangered species."

Kanz said the state agency might demand that Woodruff take mitigation steps to compensate for damage to the flower's habitat but he doubts it will halt the project.

Kanz also said he's disappointed that Oakland Mayor Dellums' office didn't get involved and take steps to stop the project.

A spokesperson for Dellums didn't return a phone call seeking comment on the matter.