

Council OKs affordable housing for 51 families

By Daniel DeBolt

A lucky group of 51 low-income families will have unusually affordable housing in an unusually high-quality development, thanks to a City Council decision made Tuesday.

The council approved a four-story development that will take the place of the Caltrain overflow parking lot at Franklin and Evelyn streets. The city will put \$8.1 million in affordable housing funds toward the \$23 million project, which will house 51 households selected in a lottery. Construction is set to begin early next year.

The developer, ROEM development corporation, has done an “outstanding job” with a plan that “looks great” said council member Jac Siegel. “No one is going to look at this and say this is a BMR (below market rate) project.”

While they had protested before, neighbors at the next-door condo complex at 108 Bryant did not speak against the project Tuesday. Those neighbors had previously raised

concerns that the development would ruin the neighborhood and block the sunlight into their homes.

The council voted 5-2 to approve the project, with Margaret Abe-Koga and John Inks opposed. Inks said he “would prefer housing policy that creates more affordable housing rather than a few gold-plated units for people who happen to win a housing lottery.”

Inks believes the city’s affordable housing program, which takes fees from market rate housing development to pay for affordable housing projects, makes new market-rate housing less affordable.

Member Laura Macias and Abe-Koga were the only members to support paying the project’s construction workers a prevailing wage, which would have increased the overall budget by \$2 million and the city’s costs by \$1 million.

“We have all kinds of rules” that address when the city pays a prevailing wage, said Mayor Ronit Bryant. “This doesn’t

fit into them. Just because we have millions of dollars” in the affordable housing fund “doesn’t mean we can spend it.”

Neil Struthers, vice president of the California Building Trades Council, said that even when paid a prevailing wage, construction workers would only be make 60 percent of the area median income. He said low pay is “the root of the problem” the city is trying to solve with affordable housing.

The project’s units will be divided equally among three groups, those who make 30 percent, 40 percent and 50 percent of the area median income, which is \$96,000 a year for a family of four.

Depending on a family’s income level and the size of apartment needed, rents will range from \$563 to \$1,600 for one-, two- or three-bedroom apartments, saving residents from \$215 to \$1,157 compared to a market-rate apartment of the same size.

