

DANVILLE

Neighbors fight columbarium

Lutheran church puts project on hold for at least 90 days

By Jason Sweeney

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DANVILLE — For members of the Peace Lutheran Church, a proposed columbarium on church grounds would be a sacred place where loved ones could honor those who have died.

To neighbors, the columbarium is a “death wall” that would lower property values, increase traffic and be a late-night hangout for teenagers.

“It’s problematic for some ethnicities who don’t want to drive past that,” neighbor Dana Jezisek said. “I think they could do a memorial garden with plants and something pretty, but we don’t need a wall that houses urns in our residential community.”

Two hundred neighbors have signed a petition against the project, and about 200 voiced their opposition at a meeting with the church July 23.

At a second meeting Monday night, there was no change in stance from the neighbors.

“The neighbors have been understanding, but at the same time are objecting to this project,” said Kelly



RENDERING COURTESY OF PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

This is an artist’s rendering of a columbarium on the grounds of Peace Lutheran Church in Danville. Neighbors say the structure would lower property values.

Young, a neighbor to the church and a board member for the Quail Gardens homeowners association. “The prevailing stance is we don’t want any more dialogue. We want this to end.”

The church, at 3201 Camino Tassajara, submitted a proposal to the town of Danville last month. It proposes a wall with niches holding plaques honoring loved ones and urns containing cremated remains. Plans call for a wall set into a 7-foot berm with landscaping and a memorial garden around it.

The meeting Monday was supposed to involve the church council and a handful of board members from surrounding homeowners associations. How-

ever, more than 50 neighbors showed up, surprising meeting organizers, said church employee Libby Flynn.

“We just tried to convey how much opposition there is to this and get them to reconsider and just drop it and not go forward with it,” Quail Gardens homeowners association president Steve Orlandi said. “We do have a strong official position in opposition against it.”

Church member Rich Collins, who facilitated the meeting, said the church has put the project on hold for at least 90 days.

“We told them we’re not stopping, but we’re not going forward,” he said. “We’re pausing. For the next 90 days, we’re in an internal reflection mode.”

Collins said some neighbors have said the church wanted to build the wall to generate revenue.

“The purpose of this is not to generate profits for the church,” Collins said. “The purpose is to meet the spiritual needs of the congregation.”

Collins said the church will attempt to find a solution that meets the needs of the church while remaining on a harmonious footing with the community.

But Orlandi said the only way to stay in the good graces of the community is to not build the wall.

“There is absolutely nothing, no happy medium, to mitigate this project,” he said. “We want them to stick to being a church, and not a cemetery.”