

Brentwood leaders see revived residential project as another sign of housing rebound

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Contra Costa Times

POSTED: 06/06/2014 08:19:38 PM PDT

BRENTWOOD -- In a further boost to the city's rebounding housing market, a major builder plans to construct more than 400 homes in a residential subdivision that has been vacant and nearly empty since 2007.

The Palmilla subdivision near Central Boulevard and Griffith Lane was originally owned by Pinn Brothers and planned to feature 574 residential units, including a 108-unit apartment complex, before the project went into bankruptcy in 2008-2009. In November, William Lyon Homes purchased 112 lots from the 78-acre subdivision that was approved by the city in 2005, and plans are in the works for the builder to also construct an additional 296 homes.

"It became an eyesore. It is very exciting to see this finally coming to fruition with the newly constructed homes," said Brentwood Planning Commissioner John Fink. "It will add to the downtown environment."

After the Palmilla project went into default and construction was halted, the project sat idle until 2012, when Integral Communities purchased it from the bank. The current plans for Palmilla include 166 fewer housing units than what was originally approved, with no apartments, and Brentwood planner Jeff Zilm said this will mean affecting the surrounding neighborhood less.

"This has been a lot of work and a long, long history," said Kevin Fryer of Integral Communities. "We did sell the first 112 lots to William Lyon and are in contract to sell the balance of the property to William Lyon."

Fryer said the project includes many partnerships, with more than three acres of land dedicated as a park and plans to help the Friends of Marsh Creek Watershed and other environmental groups with a future creek-restoration project. Fryer also noted that William Lyon will likely want to change the original development plans to meet its unique architectural style.

"If they want to change that, they have to go through design review and guidelines by the city," Zilm said. "William Lyon Homes are much better looking than what was originally approved."

Diane Burgis of Friends of Marsh Creek said the developer is environmentally conscious, and the revived development is a sign of an improving local economy. Fryer noted that William Lyon conducted extra soil analysis on the site because of some concerns over mercury, but the property was later cleared and deemed safe for residences.

"We are proud of the project and happy to be moving forward," he said.

Planning Commission Chairman Lance Crannell said many partners have worked to beautify the city, make an amenity of the nearby creek and create housing opportunities through this project. He added that it is promising to have a developer of William Lyon's stature want to come to Brentwood.

Brentwood resident Pat Sotelo urged the city to work with the Contra Costa Flood Control District to make the creek-restoration plans a reality. He said the environmental groups need a partner to get a sewer line moved for the project.

"To look at a beautifully restored creek is just a great amenity for the city," he said. "We are always looking for economic development in Brentwood, but progressive companies come to progressive cities. The more progressive Brentwood is, the more economic activity we will attract from companies that really matter."

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