

Shape Our Fremont

Where Fremont residents can learn about shaping proposed housing developments ...



Connolly Townhouses Up for Review

Warmington Residential submitted their latest plans to build townhouses on the site currently occupied by Connolly's Furniture, Bob's Giant Burger, the American Cancer Society Discovery Shop, Dominos Pizza, and several other popular businesses in Irvington.

Tentative plans for this project were presented to the Fremont City Council in November 2014. At that time, the Council gave preliminary approval to convert the property from commercial to residential. Many local residents opposed the project – some because they felt the new buildings did not fit with the neighborhood, and others because they did not want to lose the businesses that had been there for so many years.

New Numbers

The latest proposal is to build 61 townhouses on the property and a row of 10 live-work units facing onto Fremont Boulevard. Most of the buildings will be three-stories tall. A few end units will be two-stories.

The townhouses range from two bedroom/two-and-a-half bath units to larger two bedroom/four bath units with both an office and a den. The office and den of the larger units can easily be converted into bedrooms for extended families or multiple-roommate living arrangements.

The live-work units have a work space and half bath on the first floor with a business entry door to the street. Living space is on the second and third floors. The owners of the live-work units would be required to live above their individual work spaces.

Each townhouse and live-work unit has its own attached two-car garage. Parking for guests and customers will be on the site or along Chapel Way. Vehicle entry will be from Fremont Boulevard and Chapel Way. A locked emergency vehicle access gate on Kvistad Drive will give an alternate point of entry for fire apparatus.

Old Issues

Although the latest proposal brings new numbers, it raises many old issues that have been sources of concern for residents and the business community since the start.

First, approval of this project will require a General Plan Amendment. The General Plan is the basic planning document for growth throughout the entire city, and opponents claim it should not be amended on a lot-by-lot basis for individual developments. Plans for schools, water, and traffic all use the General Plan for their forecasts. The impact of this development would not be reflected in those forecasts.

Second, most of the townhouse units can have four or five occupants with vehicles, but the developer is providing only two parking spaces per unit. Nearby residential and business neighbors are concerned that vehicles from the project will overflow onto the surrounding streets and into private parking lots where they will increase noise and congestion.

Third, some people contend the live-work units simply won't work and will produce a patchwork of unattractive covered-over storefronts. For example, owners of the live-work units will not be required to move if their businesses close and will be prohibited from renting or leasing their work spaces to other businesses. Without business operations on the ground floor, owners may simply put drapes across the front windows, lock the front doors, and use the spaces for storage or living areas. Critics say that is exactly what will happen with this project.

Other concerns are that some of the townhouses are too close to the adjacent properties, depriving neighbors of privacy in their backyards. Nearby business owners point out that the tall live-work buildings along the sidewalk on Fremont Boulevard will block the view of their businesses from the street. The business owners on the site who will be forced to move are concerned about the expense of relocation and the loss of customers.

Comments Shape Changes

This project is just entering the formal review process by the Planning Department, and the City of Fremont welcomes public input about the proposed development.

Residents should send their comments and concerns directly to the Planning Department by emailing Staff Planner Bill Roth at broth@fremont.gov. This will ensure that all public correspondence becomes part of the legal record and is forwarded to the Planning Commission and City Council members for consideration.

The developer is holding a Community Outreach Meeting to let residents view the project plans, ask questions, and express their concerns. The meeting will be on Tuesday, June 30, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. in Fukaya Meeting Room B of the Fremont Main Library.