

Shape Our Fremont

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



Tearing Down Irvington Businesses Poses Tough Questions

On December 10, the Fremont Planning Commission will review the latest proposal to tear down all the buildings on the Connolly Center and Chapel Business Center properties in Irvington and replace them with rows of townhouses.

It's a decision that will affect the future of several popular business establishments located there, and will pose some tough questions about Fremont's General Plan and how their Business Pruning Policy is applied.

The Proposal

A developer is proposing to build 56 townhouses and 11 live/work units on an L-shaped piece of land that extends from Fremont Boulevard around the corner to Chapel Way. The dwellings will be grouped in long rows of buildings, with five to seven units in each building. Most will be three stories tall.

The live/work units will be at the sidewalk on Fremont Boulevard, with work spaces on the ground floor and living spaces for the business owners on the upper two floors. The work spaces are small and are intended for office uses. Many types of businesses, including restaurants and most retail stores, would not be allowed under Fremont codes.

As part of the proposal, all the existing businesses on the site -- Connolly's Furniture, Bob's Giant Burgers, Kelly Moore Paints, Fitness 19, Conklin Brothers Floor Covering, Domino's Pizza, American Cancer Society's Discovery Shop, and others -- will be forced to move and the buildings will be demolished.

.....And the Questions

There are a lot of questions about this proposal, but the most important question is why the proposal is being made at all?

The most recent Fremont General Plan was adopted by the City Council in 2011. It is intended to provide direction for all development in Fremont over the next 20 years. In the General Plan, the Connolly and Chapel properties were carefully reviewed and given land use designations of General Commercial. So why is the developer asking the City to amend the General Plan just four years later in order to change the designations to Medium Density Residential?

Likewise, when the City created the Irvington Community Plan in 2011, one of the stated goals was "to protect and enhance Irvington as one of Fremont's key commercial centers". In that plan, these two properties were specified for commercial use with no mention of converting them to other uses. So why does the developer want to force the businesses on these properties to move elsewhere?

When Fremont established its so-called "business pruning policy" for converting underutilized, underperforming business properties to other uses, it listed potential problems such as high vacancy rates, rapid turnover of tenants, and deteriorating physical conditions as important criteria for making those decisions. So why is the City applying the policy to these two properties, where none of those conditions exist?

And finally, when the residents of Fremont were recently asked to name the best businesses in a variety of categories, three of the businesses in the Connolly Center were among the top choices, and two others on an adjacent property also earned top spots. That means five of the most popular businesses in Fremont are located in this one small area. So why did an outside consultant state that this area was "not a prime, or even good, retail location"?

Stop the Bulldozers

Based on the City's published plans and policies, there is no good reason to convert these two properties from commercial to residential. The businesses located there are successful, and several of them have been serving the community for 40 years or more. Many people feel that Fremont needs to keep good businesses in convenient locations. We should be helping these businesses grow, not forcing them to move away.

Many residents have already written to the City opposing this development. They feel this is a good business location and the shops and stores and restaurants are an important part of the surrounding community.

Anyone who has a comment or concern about the proposed development is encouraged to write directly to Bill Roth, City Planner, at **broth@fremont.gov**

This project will be presented to the Planning Commission for their review and recommendations on Thursday, December 10 at 7:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers. The public is encouraged to attend and let the commission know how they feel.

To learn more about this project and view the plans, go to **www.ShapeOurFremont.com**