

Planning commission approves Friars Road mixed-use project



Photo courtesy of Latitude 33

The San Diego Planning Commission recently approved a mixed-use residential project that will add 313 residential units and six shopkeeper units along Friars Road.

By Mark Armao

A 319-unit, mixed-use residential project along Friars Road was approved by the San Diego Planning Commission.

Entitled by Guardian Investment Capital LLC, the proposed development will comprise 374,171 square feet in two buildings, located across the street from Fashion Valley Mall and the Fashion Valley Transit Center.

The project will entail the demolition of three low-rise office buildings that occupy the 5.43-acre property, which was purchased by LandCap Investment Partners in 2014.

"As we drove by this [site], and what got our keen interest, was these office buildings seemed obsolete," said LandCap chief operating officer Jeffrey Holbrook during a Planning Commission meeting in April. "Planners coast to coast have been talking about getting housing near shopping and housing near transit, and this location gave us the opportunity to do that."

Designed by Tucker Sadler Architects and Latitude 33 Planning and Engineering, the project will build an eight-story apartment building with 243 units and a nine-story condominium building with 70 units. Six shopkeeper units, which will serve as residences and commercial space, will be included on the ground floor of the apartment building.

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The development will include a fitness center, recreation rooms, pools and a lobby for each structure.

The land sits at the base of a steep hillside, with as much as 140 feet of elevation change along the property line. To fit the mid-rise structures onto the sloped site, the buildings were designed to conform to the surrounding landscape.

"Our buildings take on the shape and landform of the bluff as it exists today," said Greg Mueller, CEO and principal of Tucker Sadler Architects.

According to planning documents, a commercial development in the 1960s disturbed the lower portions of the hillside, resulting in a cut slope.

To preserve the hillside and reduce erosion, the team will construct a retaining wall, install a soil-stabilizing mesh and plant a variety of vegetation on the bluff.

The development team engaged in substantial community outreach, beginning in 2015, to solicit feedback from the community. One of the most highly touted aspects of the project is its proximity to the transit center.

As an incentive for residents to use alternative transportation options, the project will offer unbundled parking, meaning that residents without cars will pay a lower monthly rent.

A total of 493 parking spaces will be provided in two levels of partially below-grade parking.

To accommodate the increased foot traffic that will result from the transit-oriented project, the developers will enhance pedestrian crossings along Friars Road, according to a traffic engineering consultant for the developer.

"I encourage this kind of density," commissioner Doug Austin said during the April meeting. "I think it's what San Diego needs."