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Carlsbad Village project uses community input, gets approved



Rendering courtesy of AVRIP Skyport Studios

Carlsbad Village Lofts will add 106 apartments and three retail spaces along Carlsbad Village Drive, just west of Interstate 5.

By Mark Armao

The design for a four-story, mixed-use apartment building in Carlsbad Village was unanimously approved last week by Carlsbad City Council.

Developed by the San Diego-based Gerber Group, Carlsbad Village Lofts will include 106 apartments, 9,500 square feet of retail space and 185 parking spaces on a 2.23-acre parcel, located just west of Interstate 5 on Carlsbad Village Drive.

Last week's approval represents the culmination of three years of public outreach intended to incorporate community input and adhere to the City of Carlsbad's sustainability, infill and affordable housing goals, said Evan Gerber, president and founder of Gerber Group.

Half of the property has been vacant for several years, and the other half holds a Denny's restaurant that will be demolished and relocated.

"Right now, you have 18-wheelers and RVs parking on the vacant lot, so I think [the development] is going to have a transformative effect, setting the tone as you enter the Village with a high-quality building," Gerber said.

Designed by AVRP Skyport Studios, a San Diego-based architectural firm, the apartment building will include a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom units, ranging from about 600 to 1,400 square feet.

Common amenities will include a fitness center, dining and barbecue areas, a conference room and a rooftop terrace with vegetable gardens for tenants.

Three retail spaces will front Carlsbad Village Drive. Although no agreements have been made, the project team is in talks with potential tenants including a deli, a bakery and a pet-related business.

The estimated \$30 million build will include digging one level of below-grade parking. One hundred forty-six parking spaces will be reserved for residents, and 39 stalls will be set aside for retail customers.

The project will also add a pedestrian-oriented street, or woonerf, connecting Grand Avenue to Carlsbad Village Drive.

Gerber, who has collaborated with AVRP Skyport on several projects, said he selected the site for its prominent location and proximity to public transportation stops.

The transit-oriented project includes several sustainable features, such as photovoltaic panels, electric vehicle charging stations, eco-friendly building materials and energy-saving insulation strategies.

The project team's smart-growth approach was lauded by the Carlsbad council, which in recent years has rarely given unanimous approval to developments of similar scale.

"Part of [smart growth] is just putting density in the right spot," said Douglas H. Austin, chairman and CEO of AVRP Skyport. "You can walk to the grocery store, you can walk to restaurants... you literally wouldn't have to have a car if you didn't want one."

The inclusion of on-site affordable housing was also welcomed by the city council.

Instead of paying an in-lieu fee to subsidize the development of off-site affordable housing, the developer built 16 rent-restricted units for households making 60 percent or less of the area median income.

In return, Gerber could add bonus density to the project. Under the city's inclusionary housing scheme, Gerber was entitled to several more concessions-such as increased height and reduced setbacks-that he did not exploit.

"We didn't need them," he said.

And, while the development team's philosophy of creating transit-oriented, walkable districts calls for less car travel and therefore less parking, the Carlsbad community was adamant that the developer add ample on-site parking.

Neighbors were also concerned that the building would not fit in with the prevalent architectural styles in the surrounding area.

To engage the community, Gerber attended many of the public meetings related to the project and handed out flyers to neighbors within a 600-foot radius of the site. He said the design program changed several times to incorporate input from community members.

The resulting design mixes stone, brick and wood finishes in a contemporary craftsmen aesthetic intended to complement the existing architecture in Carlsbad Village.

"When you're building and designing in existing neighborhoods - which is where we want to grow - you run into challenges with getting the community educated and making sure you're hitting the right notes," Gerber said. "But, [Austin] created a piece of art... we got our 5-0 vote, and we're proud of that."

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