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Senior housing part of BioMarin expansion

Drug maker's San Rafael plan includes senior health center, apartments

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For the North Bay Business Journal

San Rafael's City Council could next month approve construction of a joint redevelopment proposal from BioMain Pharmaceutical and the nonprofit Whistlestop of a project combining the drug makers' operations with a senior health center and apartments at 999 Third at the corner of Brooks Street downtown.

The deal, approved by the city planning commission last month, calls for construction of two, four-story BioMarin research laboratory and office builds, part of an expansion of the company's existing campus in the city.

In addition, a six-story building would be occupied by Whistlestop, founded in 1954 to support independent living for seniors and those with disabilities, and Eden Housing, which will create 67 senior studio and one-bedroom apartments in the building.

This property will be the site for the first Whistlestop Integrated Health Services Center to be built on a one-third acre parcel on a portion of BioMarin's existing land. Backers said the center will bring medical professionals to the patient at a single location, in most cases without having them travel all over the county to get the care they need.

The Whistlestop portion of this parcel was obtained in property swap agreement. BioMarin made an in-kind donation of \$1.2 million to Whistlestop through a land exchange handing over the 15,000 square foot parcel valued at \$2.6 million in exchange for property owned by Whistlestop valued at \$1.4 million, according to Jennifer Golbus, marketing strategist at Whistlestop.

Under terms of a separate building partnership between Whistlestop and Eden Housing, Whistlestop would own and occupy floors 1-2 of the building. Senior apartments on floors 3-6 would be owned and managed by Eden Housing with rents in an estimated range of \$770 to \$1,650 a month. Apartments are designed for low-income seniors age 62 and above who earn less than 60% of the area median income.

"Our goal is to build a Healthy Aging Campus combining a first floor Integrated Health Services Center and senior housing that addresses the urgent needs of older adults in Marin County looking for social connections, affordable homes and healthy



Joe O'Hehir, CEO of Whistlestop, stands near a model of a new San Rafael building that will be the site for the nonprofit's first healthy aging campus and integrated health center on floors 1 and 2. Upper floors will have 67 senior apartments to be built by Eden Housing.

COURTESY OF WHISTLESTOP

living support," said Whistlestop CEO Joe O'Hehir. "This center will be open to all older adults in the county, not just those who live here. It will have three exam rooms and private health services consultation offices."

He said some 16,000 older adults in Marin County are isolated and currently living alone. O'Hehir estimated that 7,000 county seniors need affordable housing.

"We believe it takes a community solution to address a community crisis -- including an epidemic of loneliness -- by providing more options for seniors to safely live close to each other under an umbrella of care. Marin is the fastest aging county in the state."

Last June, the city's Design-Review Board voted to support this project. On Sept. 24, the San Rafael Planning Commission approved the Draft Environmental Impact report, and in November held public hearings on the merits of this project.

According to O'Hehir, only one step remains. The San Rafael City Council still has to vote to approve the overall development plan. With positive recommendations from the Design Review Board, the Planning Commission and after conversations with council members, O'Hehir believes a positive decision could come in early March. "We only need three votes," he said. "Officials I have spoken with want to

see it approved."

If all goes as planned, this building would open in mid-2022. Van Meter Williams and Pollack LLC of San Francisco is the architect for this project, and Eden Homes will select a local contractor to construct the building.

On the second floor, Whistlestop is planning to have a community room, auditorium, classrooms, a computer center, exercise studio and two conference rooms. Office space will be provided for volunteer coordinators, those providing information assistance and referrals, along with health, social, nutritional and program services personnel.

Floors 3 to 6 will have a combined total of 50 studio apartments, 16 one-bedroom units in addition to a two-bedroom manager's unit. The third floor will also have a 1,558 SF landscaped outdoor courtyard. Garden plots for residents wishing to grow their own vegetables will be located within a second-floor outdoor atrium and on two 6th floor roof decks.

In March 2013 Whistlestop selected Hayward-based Eden Housing as its general partner for the housing portion of this project. Since 1968, Eden manages more than 9,000 apartment homes in 140 California communities.

"We are excited to be part of this forward-looking model project," said Linda

Mandolini, president of Eden Housing. "We're also looking at ways to work with local housing authorities to obtain rent subsidies for seniors in these apartments."

The estimated cost of the Whistlestop/Eden Housing building is \$48 million. Of this total, some \$38 million would be for the affordable housing component and \$10 million for the Healthy Aging Center. Whistlestop has already raised \$10 million to cover its capital requirement.

The top four floors will be financed by Eden Housing sources, according to Mandolini, including low income housing tax credits, government grants under California Propositions 1 and 2, and possibly with additional debt financing.

"It's going to be a place where seniors can access a variety of services, amenities and be close to each other as well as nearby shopping opportunities and transportation via bus and SMART. I want to go to a place like this when I retire," she added.

Whistlestop is also seeking participation from other local partners and providers to become part of its Integrated Health Services Center. Talks have been held with Kaiser Permanente, Marin Health, Marin Community Clinics, The Institute on Aging, Centers for Elder Independence, Sutter Health and Humana, etc., -- as well as physicians and other hospitals that may wish to refer their patients.