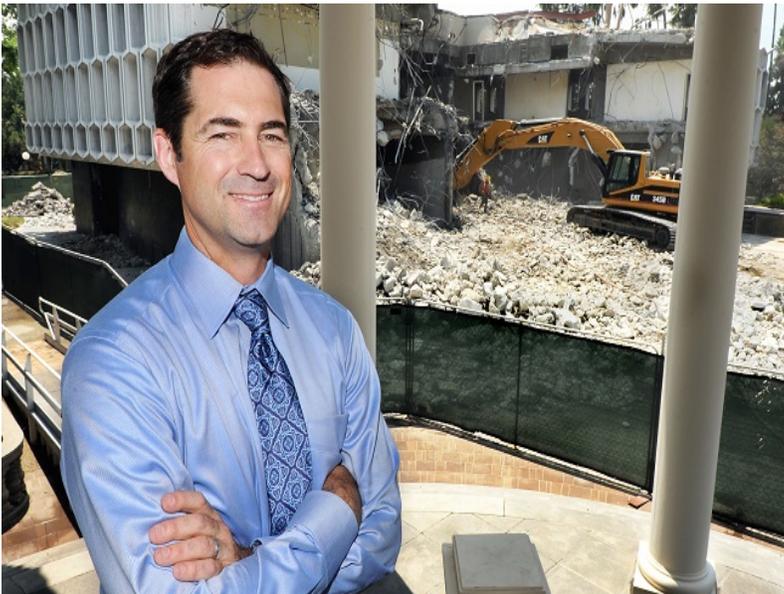


Long-delayed housing project in Pasadena will be ready in the fall

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By Janette Williams



PASADENA - It's taken 15 years, four developers, one receivership and countless contentious neighborhood meetings, but the first 10 townhouses in one of the city's largest, most prestigious housing developments will go on the market this fall. "The Bungalows" in the newly named Ambassador Gardens, the first of 150 luxury townhouses and flats, have a price tag in the "low \$1 million" range. And, as work continues on developing the former Worldwide Church of God's Ambassador College campus, demolition is under way on the distinctive "egg-crate" building that's been a familiar sight for decades from Orange Grove Boulevard. It's a day some in the city thought might never come.

"Well, it has been a long, long saga, as many of these issues have been," said Sue Mossman, executive director of Pasadena Heritage, one of the groups, along with the West Pasadena Residents Association, that fought early proposals to put about 2,000 units on the former Worldwide Church of God's bucolic campus,

The developer, City Ventures, she said, is "implementing for the most part, the plan that was arrived at through years of negotiations" over density and preserving the elaborate gardens, lawns, trees, public space and historic mansions on site.

"The newest wrinkle is that they have now taken over the large parcels along Green Street that were going to be the senior living complex," Mossman said. "So they are designing more housing for that part of the project now that will be quite different from the senior housing project -- it will be regular town houses and condos ... and we have not seen the newest drawings yet for that part of the project."

City Ventures spokesman Ben Besley said the developers bought the additional parcels when plans for "Sterling of Pasadena," a six-story, 440,000-square-foot senior living complex by Sunrise, were dropped,

"The project Sunrise had been proposing was fairly massive, and the project we're anticipating putting there is not as tall and is less massive," Besley said, No details are in place yet, he said. "We are just focused on high quality design and architectural style. The footprint density is still working through the city."

Besley declined to say how much City Ventures paid for the new parcels. The company paid about \$15 million in 2010 to acquire 10 acres of the Ambassador property from Fortress Investments Group hedge fund; the property earlier went into receivership when the borrowers defaulted on a \$44-million loan in the depths of the housing slump,

Adding housing in place of senior living will up the number of "inclusionary," or affordable housing, units required by the project approval, said Jim Wong, senior project manager for the city.

For the first four phases, a total of 70 condos, City Ventures must provide seven affordable units on the site. Wong said all the apartments will be rentals.

"We are in the middle of working with the developer on the marketing plan and the selection process," Wong said. "One thing that will not change, that applies to any affordable units, is that preference will be given to persons who live or work in the city."

The affordable apartments will be mostly studio and one-bedroom units, with just one two-bedroom, for "smaller households," and will be available for six low-income and one very-low-income qualified applicants, Wong said.

The first seven units are in an existing building on the Ambassador campus and are "nice large apartments ... pretty much ready to be occupied," Wong said.

The rental units are unusual in that they are all in the same building, not spread throughout the development, said Bill Huang, Pasadena's housing director. "In this case, rentals and ownership are in different buildings."

The development saga began in 2004, five years after the Worldwide Church of God put its entire 49-acre Ambassador College campus on the market; a bitter doctrinal schism ended tithing and led to the financial problems that finally closed the college after 50 years in Pasadena. The church later sold the campus in three pieces. Maranatha School and Harvest Rock Church -- which now owns the famed Ambassador Auditorium -- moved on to the west campus in 2004; the same year, Sares Regis bought the 12-acre east campus for a mixed retail and residential development.

It wasn't until 2007 that plans hashed out by Ambassador West -- the third developer -- won over the city and neighbors with drastically scaled-back density that preserved 12 acres of open space.

City Ventures, which will now build on 19 acres of the 29-acre site, adopted that plan and is now marketing the development as a "one-of-a-kind setting that combines historic, themed gardens and sculptures ... unusually large share of open space, gardens and parks within an urban setting" close to Old Pasadena.

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