



## Tradeway Senior Housing project takes shape in El Cerrito

By Dale F. Mead  
Correspondent

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EL CERRITO -- The city has made Eden Housing Inc. its first choice to develop the former Tradeway Furniture parcel at 10848 and 10860 San Pablo Ave., with Mercy Housing Development as the backup.

The Oct. 18 decision by the City Council, acting as the redevelopment agency, commits the city to negotiate with the Hayward-based developer on planning and financing the project. If that process is successfully concluded, the developer would then buy the property and build and manage the facility.

Eden and Mercy were among 11 respondents to a Request for Qualifications and Proposals published last April.

Eden proposes two four-story structures -- a residential building with 64 affordable senior housing units and a mixed-use building fronting on the street, housing a medical clinic, small retail stores and offices, and a common area. An elevated breezeway bridge would connect the buildings.

The proposal design also features an open area between the project and City Hall facilities next door.

Many steps remain before construction, however. Completion is four or five years away, city senior project manager Hilde Myall told the agency.

Purchased in 2004 with \$4.05 million dedicated to developing low- and moderate-income housing, the properties south of City Hall also would serve goals of revitalizing the Civic Center area and housing a community oriented use such as a service center.

The staff recommended Eden and Mercy based

largely on their strategies and track record at financing and running similar projects around the Bay Area. The economic climate has weakened federal programs created to encourage affordable housing, making viable financing strategies critical to a sustainable project.

Eden's proposal for a combined affordable-housing, retail and social services project includes a key tenant: Oakland-based Samuel Merritt University, which would run a health clinic staffed by medical faculty and students.

The plan relies on federal senior housing subsidies, either the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program or the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department's 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly Program.

The proposal and staff report acknowledged that the federal funding is very competitive, and funding for senior services programs that the complex would offer is uncertain. But Eden touted its experience at managing complex funding and regulations at similar facilities elsewhere.

The proposal does not address an existing building on the property that the El Cerrito Historical Society has been campaigning to save as a historic structure.

The small building on San Pablo Avenue, which has a stone facing and four gables, was built in the late 1920s as a sales office for a Sonoma County stone

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quarry. In 1935 it became Contra Costa Flowers, owned by the Tomi and Hikojiro Mabuchi family, and is the last structure within the city limits related to the once-thriving family nurseries established by Japanese-Americans in the area.

Most recently the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce leased the front building for its office until the city took over the property in 2008. It now stands vacant.

Before the agency selected Eden, historical society leader Tom Panas repeated his plea to "make preservation of the 10848 San Pablo Ave. site "... a requirement of this project."

Former Albany Mayor Jewel Okawachi, whose family has business roots in the area, made a similar plea, saying, "It's important that you preserve this building."

The city has maintained that a decision on preserving the building awaits a California Environmental Quality Act report later in the process.

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