



## **Residents Rally to Save Irvington Business Centers**

After almost a year of meetings, studies, and discussions, the fate of the Connolly Center on Fremont Boulevard and the Chapel Business Center on Chapel Way will go before the Fremont City Council on November 18.

At stake is a proposal by Warmington Residential to tear down all the businesses and replace them with multi-story residential condominiums and townhouses fronting directly on Fremont Boulevard. The developer is asking the City Council to change the General Plan land use from commercial to residential. Many local residents are saying “no”.

The two centers, which form an “L” on adjoining pieces of property, include Bob’s Giant Burgers, Connolly’s Furniture, Conklin Brothers Floor Coverings, Kelly Moore Paints, Domino’s Pizza, American Cancer Society’s Discovery Shop, State Farm Insurance, and several other businesses.

Bob’s Giant Burgers has been in this location since 1961 and is considered by many to be an Irvington landmark. Connolly’s Furniture and Conklin Brothers Floor Coverings have been serving the community from this site since the late-1940s.

Both properties were designated to remain commercial in the most recent Fremont General Plan, which was approved in December 2011 and was intended to shape the growth of the city for the next 10-25 years.

## **Business Pruning Policy**

The Connolly/Chapel proposal was first presented to the City Council in January 2014. At that time, the Council postponed a decision and directed city staff to study all business centers in Irvington as part of Fremont’s Commercial Property Conversion policy.

The policy, sometimes called the “business pruning policy”, encourages conversion of under-performing, under-utilized business properties into other uses - often multi-story residential. It specifies several criteria for evaluating poor business properties including high vacancy rates, rapid turnover of tenants, and deteriorating physical conditions.

When an under-utilized business property has been identified, the city staff can work with the property owner, tenants, and developers to determine if there are other possible uses for the site.

## **Irvington Land Use Study**

For the latest study, an outside consultant was hired to look at all the business properties in the Irvington District with special attention to those located in the Five Corners area at the heart of old Irvington, the area around Fremont and Grimmer, the shopping center at Grimmer and Blacow, and the corner businesses at Blacow and Fremont.

The result was the Irvington Land Use Study, which made general recommendations for all of the properties. It specifically encouraged growth in the Five Corners area because that was a central location for the whole district.

The study listed several problems with the Connolly site. These problems focused on access, visibility, and parking, that, according to the study, would prevent the property from becoming a successful business location. It recommended the site be converted to a more dense residential use. It did not comment on the Chapel site.

## **Residents Get Involved**

Tearing down successful businesses can have a negative impact on the surrounding residential area. Building new homes in the wrong place can have an equally negative impact. Both points have generated a variety of concerns among residents and business owners, who have been expressing their thoughts about the proposed Connolly/Chapel development to the Fremont Planning Department during the past year.

The general feeling is that many of the problems mentioned in the study aren't really problems, and that none of the criteria listed for under-utilized commercial properties applies to the two properties. Several comments challenge the contention that these are not good business locations and point out that some of the businesses have been operating successfully at this location for fifty years or more and should not be forced to move or close.

Other concerns relate to the proposal to build multi-story residential units on the site. Some of these include spillover parking from the new residential units onto surrounding streets, increased traffic on Fremont Boulevard, and the additional student load on the already over-crowded neighborhood schools.

At this point, the best way for people to express their concerns is by sending emails to the City Project Planner listed below not later than Thursday, November 13, or by speaking at the City Council meeting on Tuesday, November 18 at 7 p.m.

Residents may also send emails directly to the City Councilmembers at any time before the meeting. Their email addresses are on the contact section of [www.ShapeOurFremont.com](http://www.ShapeOurFremont.com)

**Connolly/Chapel City Council Meeting Tuesday, November 18**

**City Project Planner Bill Roth at [broth@fremont.gov](mailto:broth@fremont.gov)**

**For more information and a link to the Irvington Land Use Study, visit [www.ShapeOurFremont.com](http://www.ShapeOurFremont.com)**