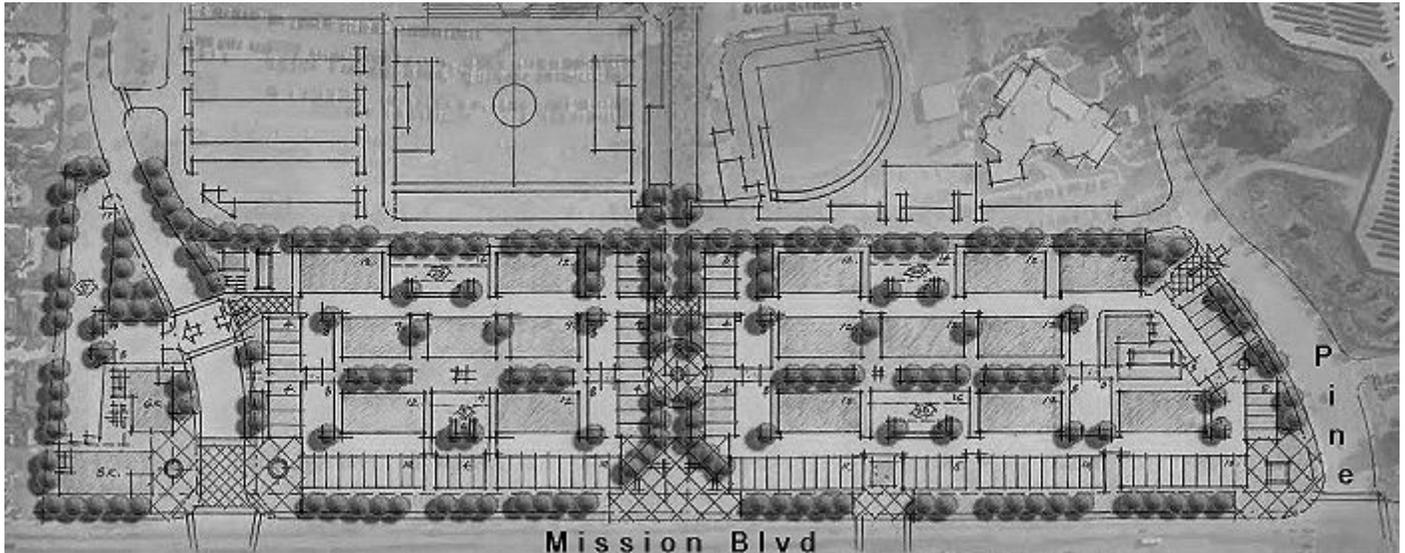


Shape Our Fremont

Where Fremont residents can learn about shaping proposed housing developments...

Ohlone College Accepts Bid for 275 Rental Units on Mission Boulevard



On April 12, the Ohlone College Board of Trustees authorized the college to enter into negotiations with SteelWave LLC for a 99-year ground lease as part of a proposal to build 275 residential rental units and 17, 910 square feet of retail/commercial/office space in front of the Fremont college campus along Mission Boulevard. The vote was 5 in favor, 1 opposed, with 1 absent.

The project must be presented to the City of Fremont for review and a final decision.

Need for Steady Revenue

The action came after Ohlone College determined that 15 acres of frontage property were not needed for future college uses and declared the property surplus. At the same time, the college saw the need to generate an on-going source of revenue that was not dependent on state funding. The funds would be used for a variety of educational purposes including ensuring appropriate levels of teaching staff and courses.

After studying the alternatives, the college requested bids for a long-term ground lease development that included a mix of uses, but could not be entirely residential. The developer, or a third-party company, would build, manage, and maintain the project, while the college would retain ownership of the land.

A Big Project

The SteelWave proposal includes 87 one-bedroom flats, 148 two-bedroom flats, and 40 three-bedroom townhouses grouped in 18 buildings located between Anza Street/Witherly Lane and Pine Street along Mission Boulevard. About a third of the one-bedroom flats will be configured as live-work units, and a number of ground-floor units are identified as being suitable for seniors. The retail/commercial/office spaces will be located in a single building located on the north side of Anza Street/Witherly Lane. All the buildings will be two-stories.

Vehicle entrance and exit to the project will be from Anza/Witherly and Pine, not from Mission. A total of 513 parking spaces will be provided on site for residents and 67 spaces for the commercial buildings. The existing grove of heritage olive trees will be preserved, although many of them may have to be relocated to accommodate the building layout.

During the meeting, Trustee Ishan Shah expressed a desire to have some units dedicated to seniors. Trustee Greg Bonaccorsi wanted to include housing units for teachers and education support personnel employed at schools and colleges within the area. There was no direct comment on the affordability level for these two requests.

Chairperson Richard Watters, who cast the lone vote against the project, said he felt the college should balance their need for income with the needs and concerns of the surrounding community. He favored the bid from Dutra Enterprises Incorporated (DEI), which included fewer units and a more modest income stream.

What's Next?

The Fremont General Plan currently designates the entire Ohlone College campus as a Public Facility. The developer will first have to request a General Plan Amendment Screening to determine if the City wants to consider changing the land use designation of the frontage property to Mixed-Use commercial/residential. That may present a challenge, because all of the residential units will probably be rented at market rate, and Fremont does not need any more units at that income level.

If the City decides to let the project move forward, the plans will then have to be reviewed by the Planning Department, Historical Architectural Review Board, Planning Commission, and City Council for a final decision. This process is estimated to take two years.

Overall, the project may face several other hurdles. During several community outreach meetings, residents had suggested a variety of desirable developments for the site including a food market, an urban farm, and one-story senior housing. No one suggested a large-scale housing project as being desirable because of the perceived negative impact on Fremont's overcrowded schools and roads. The college's decision not to accept the community's suggestions, coupled with the rising concerns about on-going development in general, may result in significant public opposition as the project moves forward.

To express your concerns directly to the college before the bid is finalized on June 17, email trustees@ohlone.edu (mention Frontage Ground Lease as the subject)