

project that mixes senior living, retail

By MORYT MILO

The planning commission is considering what city planners described as a "keystone" project along the Winchester corridor, a proposal to redevelop 3.69 acres at the corner of Winchester Boulevard and Rincon Avenue into a mixed-use project with senior living units above retail.

The Campbell City Council paved the way for the development when it approved an amendment to the city's General Plan on Jan. 16 that rezoned the parcel from central commercial to medium-density residential. The change in zoning was required to allow for the construction of a 21-unit Alzheimer's facility that would not have been permitted in the commercial district under the existing code.

The project will be known as Merrill Gardens at Campbell. Merrill Gardens is a family-owned business that operates senior housing facilities nationwide. The operator is working closely with Barry Swenson Builder on a 98-unit project in Willow Glen at the intersection of Curci Drive and Meridian Avenue.

The Campbell project would include 127 units, of which 19 will be provided as affordable housing rentals. The complex will be made up of 101 senior rental units for independent or assisted living, 26 non-age-restricted rental units and the separate Alzheimer's facility. The 16,710-square-foot project would include retail facing out onto Winchester Boulevard.

Campbell planning commissioners met for the first time with Merrill Gardens representatives and project managers to informally discuss and familiarize themselves with the plans and ask questions about the services and amenities that would be provided to residents. Traffic and parking were also discussed, with Merrill Gardens representatives telling the commissioners that since the average age of a resident living in these facilities is 82, most do not have vehicles, and those who do drive them infrequently. The facility provides shuttles for seniors to shop and run errands.

The initial drawings for the project include amenities such as a lounge and library, activity center, wine bar, wellness center, landscaped courtyard and patio in addition to dining facilities that

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Busy Corner: Chevron station plans to replace kiosk with convenience market 7



Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer

Campbell Living: Metropolitan Planning Group co-owner Geoff Bradley was a former senior planner for the city of Campbell. One of his favorite projects is Park Tower Place, a townhome project he helped plan next to the Water Tower.

Building Character

Former city planner is still close to home

By ALICIA UPANO

When Geoff Bradley drove by the Greyhound bus station in Sunnyvale, he couldn't help but admire the 1,500-square-foot building. The 1966 building was creatively designed considering its peculiar location—underneath the Mathilda Avenue overpass.

Framed in walls of glass, the building exemplifies post-war modern/international architectural style and reminded Bradley of architect Philip Johnson's famed Glass House in New Canaan, Conn.

"I remember thinking it would make a great coffee shop or art gallery," says Bradley, a Campbell resident.

A childhood interest in architecture led him to a career in city planning, working

for the city of Sunnyvale from 1995 to 1997, and then moving into Campbell as a redevelopment coordinator from 1997 to 2000 and from there to senior planner in the planning department until 2005.

Then he worked for KB Home and also did contract work for Cupertino and Mountain View. Mountain View planning manager Whitney McNair hired Bradley as a contractor. The two planners had met several years earlier at professional meetings. McNair is an East Bay native with more than 12 years of professional planning experience.

During his stint in Mountain View, Bradley passed by the old bus station on his daily trek home. It may have been kismet the day McNair, heading home to Cupertino, saw Bradley scoping out the vacant building. The station was closed in 2004.

McNair pulled over, and Bradley said he thought the building would make a great planning office. Both were ready to strike out on their own, and that's exactly what

they did, forming Metropolitan Planning Group in 2006.

Bradley's vision to reuse the building also materialized. Light pours onto their desks where passengers once waited for buses to pull onto Evelyn Avenue. McNair and Bradley roll out plans on the same counter where people once bought their bus tickets and checked their luggage.

The planning counter takes center stage in the office, just as it did for Bradley in Campbell and McNair in Mountain View. As senior planner for the Orchard City, Bradley worked collaboratively with residents, developers, city departments, planning commissioners and city council members.

Campbell planning commissioners Tom Francois and Bob Alderete credit Bradley for getting "Welcome to Campbell" added to the Kohl's sign that looks out onto the Highway 17 Hamilton Avenue south exit. Bradley says there was only one sign on the

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highway that advised travelers they were passing through Campbell. The "Welcome to Campbell" sign was a compromise between Kohl's desire for a roadside sign and an identity marker for the city.

"Every time I look at that sign, I think of him," Francois says. "I think the branding is there for everyone to see what Campbell is."

The men describe Bradley as a consummate professional with a sense of humor. He approached his work with integrity and didn't shy away from healthy, rigorous debate on projects, they say.

The commissioners point to numerous projects that bear Bradley's signature: the Kohl's retail project that replaced former Breuners Home Furnishing site; the single-family homes built at the former Rolling Hills Shopping Center; and the mixed-use project that is going up on the old Fung Lum restaurant site at the corner

'I knew every nook and cranny. It wasn't abstract planning theory about whether the PruneYard has enough parking; I knew it.'

—Geoff Bradley

of Bascom Avenue and Campisi Way.

Other projects that bear his mark are the downtown Second Street garage and light rail station. The personal impact of those projects can be found in his office, where pictures of each hang.

For Campbell Planning Commissioner Liz Gibbons, Bradley had a knack for guiding developers in creating projects that balanced parking, noise and the placement of signs. He also helped the commission understand a developer's perspective, she says.

As an architect, Gibbons also appreciated Bradley's concern for the aesthetic of a project, which is apparent in the N. First Street condominium project, Park Tower Place, near the city's landmark Water Tower. Gibbons says Bradley worked with the developer to create a design that would honor the water tower's history in Campbell while providing a transition between past and present, downtown and residential. The units are nearly complete, and contain artwork, brick and stucco.

"Campbell is always finding that balance between an urban area and small-town feel," Bradley says.

He credits living in the city with making him an effective planner.

"I knew every nook and cranny. It wasn't abstract planning theory about whether the PruneYard has enough parking; I knew it," Bradley says.

Bradley grew up in Laguna Beach, and says his interest in architecture was sparked at age 5. Bradley went to California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, where he planned to major



Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer

Innovative Space: Metropolitan Planning Group owners Geoff Bradley of Campbell and Whitney McNair both worked for South Bay cities as planners. They branched off on their own and rented the former Greyhound bus station in Sunnyvale to serve as their office.



Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer

History Reused: Geoff Bradley (right) and partner Whitney McNair (left) speak to a prospective client. The old Greyhound bus station that is now his office intrigued Bradley. The partners retained the ticket counter to conduct business and roll out plans.

in architecture but switched to city and regional planning. After receiving his bachelor's degree, Bradley also received a master's degree in architecture.

He met his wife, Heather, in San Luis Obispo. The couple moved to the Bay Area in 1995 and have three children, ages 10, 6 and 3. Heather is also a planner and works with Metropolitan Planning Group.

The firm's principals—McNair and Bradley—have received numerous awards for their work. The firm offers assistance in urban design, policy planning, transit-oriented development and development review and entitlement services, and is working with seven cities and eight private clients. In Campbell, Bradley is consulting on the proposed Merrill Gardens senior

living project on Winchester Boulevard, and the 15-unit single-family home project off N. First Street adjacent to the N. First Street Garage.

McNair's strength is building consensus among groups. The firm uses its public and professional experience to understand the differing perspectives. Bradley says cities are often focused on how a community may benefit from a project, and the development process can take months. However, the developer also needs to make the project financially feasible, and timing is often crucial.

"This is a pretty unique business model," McNair says, noting that many planning firms have a narrower focus.

Even though the two partners have gone from government employees to entrepreneurs, one thing has remained the same: They work as many hours, if not more than they did in their previous jobs. Both however, appreciate the flexibility of ownership, which allows them a personal life and time with their young children. McNair has two children, ages 3 and 5.

Another aspect of their job that has not changed is the strong connections they made while city planners.

Mountain View is one of Metropolitan Planning Group's clients, and Bradley represents developers who want to do business in Campbell.

Commissioners Francois and Alderete are happy to trade old jokes and jabs with Bradley. Beneath the camaraderie, Alderete says, is respect.

"We see Geoff," Alderete says, "and it's a handshake and a hug."

For more information on the Metropolitan Planning Group, visit mplanninggroup.com, or call 408.730.4106.