

Westside housing development gets Planning Commission's OK

Single-family Lighthouse project would occupy former industrial space near Newport Beach city limits.



Lighthouse, an 89-unit contemporary development in Costa Mesa's Westside, will replace an industrial site and single-family home. The Planning Commission unanimously approved the development Monday night. (Courtesy CITY OF COSTA MESA, Daily Pilot / November 11, 2014)

By Bradley Zint
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The Costa Mesa Planning Commission on Monday unanimously approved a single-family housing development for the Westside that would replace a largely abandoned industrial facility.

The 89-unit, contemporary-style development, named Lighthouse, is slated for a 5.7-acre site on the southwestern edge of the city limits with Newport Beach, near the southern terminus of Whittier Avenue and western terminus of West 16th Street.

Lighthouse would replace a roughly 67,000-square-foot industrial complex used by Ametek since 1999 to design, manufacture and repair aircraft components.

City staff said the site, which contains four industrial buildings where about 150 people were once employed, is in the process of being vacated. It was developed for industrial purposes in 1960.

The Lighthouse project site also contains a single-family home along Whittier. The house, which will be demolished, is owned by the developer and rented to its current occupant.

The developer, Newport Beach-based Preface Group, plans to have 40 of the houses designed in accordance with the Westside "live-work" housing model. The units will have 250-square-foot, ground-floor work spaces, though because of the mandatory "work" component, the spaces may not be converted into extra bedrooms.

All 89 houses will be three stories tall, with garages and ocean-view rooftop decks. They will range from 1,750 to 2,290 square feet and have two to four bedrooms. Prices will start in the low \$600,000s.

After studying 11 key intersections in the Westside and Newport Beach, city staff said Lighthouse will not significantly add to area traffic.

Don Lamm, a former Costa Mesa administrator representing Preface, stressed to the commissioners that Lighthouse has sufficient parking — 332 spaces, 16 more than the city's requirement — as well as several on-site amenities not found in similar live-work tracts in the Westside.

The development will have a community pool, spa, sports court, tot lot and public art exhibition area. In addition, Preface will pay \$1.2 million in fees toward city parks.

Critics were skeptical of the development's location, lack of affordable options and three-story configurations, which they said exclude much of the elderly population.

"At what point in time do we trigger something for low-income, medium-income people?" asked resident Mary Spadoni, who said Lighthouse appeals to "hipster families" with a lot of money, not the handicapped or those with young children.

City staff noted that Costa Mesa does not have its own affordable-housing requirement and largely meets state standards for affordable housing, though the City Council can step in on a case-by-case basis.

Lamm said Lighthouse's homes will be comparatively affordable and large in a market where much smaller homes in the Eastside go for nearly \$1 million.

David Seidner, who owns commercial property nearby, said he welcomed change to the area. Lighthouse will spur revitalization in a part of town, he said, where commercial rental rates haven't grown in nearly 20 years.

Seidner also said residential traffic is highly preferable to the noisy industrial vehicles that once dominated the area.

"We don't want to see 40-foot trucks, like Ametek used to have, racing down 16th Street," he said.

Others were critical of an approved deviation that allows Lighthouse to build the homes 6 feet apart rather than the standard 10.

Six feet is the same distance found on the Balboa Peninsula and Balboa Island, Lamm said, and it works well there.

"It's normal and acceptable in the beach-oriented communities that you see here," he said.

Lamm said the spacing deviation — which was the only special exception sought to build the property — would help maintain the high amount of open space and parking. He said Lighthouse was otherwise in perfect compliance of the Westside urban plans approved by the council in 2006 that encourage the live-work-style developments.

"Until the ordinances are changed, these are property owners' rights as well to build these," Lamm said.