

200-unit plan poised for River Road in Andover

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Seminary demolition, Melmark group homes part of overall plan

ANDOVER — If plans for a 200-unit housing and condominium complex on the grounds of St. Francis Seminary on River Road win approval, the building owned by the Franciscan Friars could be demolished by the end of the year.

National developer Pulte Homes has submitted plans for the project under the town's new Senior Residential Community Overlay District approved at the 2013 Town Meeting.

Reid Blute, land acquisition manager for Pulte, a publicly traded company based in Atlanta, said the group has

a purchase-and-sale agreement with the Franciscan Friars, who own both the building and the 70-acre site at 459 River Road that it sits on.

"We have control over the parcel," Blute said. "We are in the process of going through the approvals."

Pulte will go before the Planning Board on June 9 for a special permit for the project, which would consist of 14 single-family homes and four, four-story condominium buildings containing a total of 186 units.

The company is partnering with the adjacent

Melmark School, located at 461 River Road, to develop the property.

While Pulte would end up with about 25 to 30 acres of the Friars' land, Melmark would take possession of the rest to build four group homes for its students.

According to Melmark Vice President Peter Troy, eight students would live in each of the four houses, which would be set up as transitional housing for students who are moving on to more independent living arrangements outside the school.

See PLAN, Page B2



COURTESY IMAGE

One 36-unit condominium building, shown, and three 50-unit buildings, all four stories in height, are planned as part of the Andover Woods development on the grounds of St. Francis Seminary on River Road.

PLAN:**CONTINUED FROM PLAN ON PAGE B1**

Plute project set for RiverRoad in Andover

□ *Continued from Page B1* Melmark is a school for 114 “children and young adults with autism spectrum disorders, acquired brain injury, neurological diseases and disorders, dual diagnosis and severe challenging behaviors,” according to the nonprofit institution’s website.

Town Planning Director Paul Materazzo said the Pulte proposal, dubbed Andover Woods, was consistent with some of the options proposed for the overlay zoning district, which also allows for assisted living developments.

‘Independent living’

The Pulte project falls within the zoning overlay district, which requires that at least one resident of every condo unit be over the age of 62, Blute said.

He added that it is being considered an “independent elderly living” complex, meaning that it is for “active adults” who do not need continuing care or any other health-related services.

“It’s not for folks who are infirm or looking for hospital services,” Blute said.

In keeping with provisions of the overlay district, no residents under the age of 18 can live in any of the units, which means the project won’t be bringing a lot of school-age children to the district.

“You get all the property tax income of a new home, but you don’t get the commensurate large expense on the municipal budget of kids in the school system,” Blute said. “From a fiscal standpoint, these age-restricted communities are cash-positive to the town. They return more to town coffers than they use in services.”

Aside from the age restriction, the project will be like many other Pulte developments around the country, he said. The company builds three types of housing — Centex, for families; Del Webb, for 55 and over population; and DiVosta, which are luxury properties in Florida.

grown children who have moved out of the house, and people who no longer want to deal with maintenance, mowing the lawn or shoveling the snow, for example.

There are no plans for development along the river. The project aims to preserve open space on the site, including a trail network that runs along the water with opportunities for public access, Blute said.

“We are very excited about the opportunity,” he said. “It’s a great, unique location. We think it will be successful and well-received for people in the area.”

Melmark’s plans

Melmark, meanwhile, will acquire about 30 acres from the Franciscans for four, two-story houses that will be built by Pulte, Troy said. Because Melmark is a nonprofit organization, it is exempt from the elderly housing requirements of the overlay district, he said.

The four new homes will complement the four homes the school currently has in Methuen, Dracut, Tewksbury and Peabody. Some of those residents will be moving to the Melmark property.

“It will enable us to expand the number of children we can serve on a residential and educational basis,” he said. The residences will be considered “transitional housing” for children on an IEP, or Individualized Education Program plan. Those plans stay with students until they are deemed able to move on or reach the program’s maximum age of 22. At that point, they can move back home or go into another developmental services program.

Part of Melmark’s purchase of the adjacent property includes buying a parking lot that is behind the seminary, which Troy said is critical for the organization’s needs.

Melmark is also seeking to build multi-family homes on the far side of its property, near the National Grid power line corridor.

The business plan, Troy said, calls for either building, or selling the rights to build, a small development. The proceeds would then be used to pay for other improvements at Melmark, including a full-service kitchen and cafeteria.

However, Tennessee Gas’ new path for its proposed pipeline goes through the area Melmark wants to develop as multi-family housing.

Blute said the company considered trying to save the seminary building, which was constructed in 1930 and used to train young boys for the priesthood. But there were too many problems with bringing the property up to code, making it prohibitively expensive. The town's Preservation Commission imposed a six-month demolition delay on the property several months ago. It expires later this year, Blute said.

The buildings will be erected about halfway between River Road and the Merrimack River. The gently sloping land will make the four-story buildings stand out less than if they were right on River Road, he said.

While each of the 14 houses will be detached, single-family homes, the other four buildings will include parking underneath and four levels of housing on top.

There will be one, 36-unit building with nine units per floor, and three 50-unit buildings with 12 to 13 gardenstyle units on each level. The condos are all individual units and there is no common dining room, he said. Elevators would service all four buildings.

Based on current market values, the condos in the four buildings would range from mid-\$300,000 to mid-\$400,000. The single-family, detached homes would be in the high\$500,000 to low-\$600,000 range, depending on square footage. He added the prices would likely change depending on the existing market at completion.

While he wouldn't call them "luxury," Blute said the units will be "high quality and a good value for people."

Typical customers, he said, are people who are downsizing, couples with

"We are following the 'Stop the pipeline' movement with interest," Troy said.

The Franciscans, who will also retain rights to some of their property — including the cemetery, may want to build in the corridor now being eyed for the gas pipeline as well.

"They want to have the option of building over there, too," Troy said. "If they build the pipeline, it becomes a land-taking, so we'd go through that process."

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Reid Blute