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SAN RAFAEL

BioMarin to start cleanup of soil

Project planned at ex-PG&E site

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A big-top tent will soon return to downtown San Rafael for yet another cleanup of a former Pacific Gas and Electric Co. lot, after soil tests revealed contamination on a portion of the property.

The cleanup is only one hurdle to clear for BioMarin Pharmaceuticals, which is seeking to use the 3-acre site at 999 Third Ave. for a joint development project with Whistlestop, the nonprofit agency that offers services for seniors. The San Rafael-based company also will need to pass a separate lengthy environmental impact review process, which is kicking off next month with a “scoping” meeting where the public can weigh in on environmental concerns.

“Upon completion of PG&E’s cleanup, BioMarin acquired the property with the original PG&E buildings still intact,” said Debra Charlesworth, a BioMarin spokeswoman. “Once BioMarin removed these buildings it was determined that a full remediation of the western end was necessary to accommodate the future housing and research and development facilities.”

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Cleanup

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The project site is between Second and Third streets, bounded by Lindero and Brooks streets.

The big top will likely go up in April for workers to begin soil remediation with the oversight of the Department of Toxic Substances Control, Charlesworth said.

Sandy Nax, a spokesman for DTSC, said the soil cleanup can begin after a 30-day public notification period, during which time residents can submit comments on the remediation plan.

BioMarin is also working with DTSC and PG&E to finalize a land-use covenant, which will restrict the allowable uses on the property and provide soil management guidelines for future construction.

PG&E previously conducted soil cleanup on 2 acres of the eastern side of the property. After about a yearlong effort, workers removed close to 28,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil from that eastern side of the lot. Contaminants included polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon, petroleum products and metals, according to PG&E.

When BioMarin acquired the property about a year ago, three PG&E buildings remained on the approximately 1-acre western edge of the site along Brooks Avenue. In May and June 2018, after demolition of those buildings, BioMarin performed a soil test of that section of the lot. BioMarin’s investigation revealed the same manufactured gas plant-related contaminants were in the soil of that 1-acre section,



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BioMarin’s campus sits near the former Pacific Gas and Electric Co. site at 999 Third St. in San Rafael. After soil testing showed contamination of the lot, BioMarin is getting ready to perform another cleanup. They have plans for an expansion there that includes a senior housing complex by Whistlestop.

too, Charlesworth said.

Nax said PG&E is also still required to conduct an additional round of soil gas sampling to provide assurance that the site is safe.

Deanna Contreras, spokeswoman for PG&E, said the company is sampling groundwater under the oversight of the San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board.

“To date, monitoring results show that remediation was effective,” she said.

All this work is being done to clear the way for a proposed multi-use complex. BioMarin donated about 15,000 square feet of the northwest corner of the property, valued at \$1.2 million, to Whistle-

stop. The nonprofit plans to relocate its “active aging center” from its 930 Tamalpais Ave. site at the SMART train station.

The project would include the construction of two four-story lab and office buildings for BioMarin use, and a six-story, 67-unit affordable senior housing and activities building for Whistlestop. Eden Properties of Hayward, an affordable housing developer, is working on the housing portion of the project.

“Our partners at BioMarin assure us that the site cleanup is going on schedule and as planned,” said Joe O’Hehir, CEO of Whistlestop. “We stand ready to move forward on the proposed timeline and are ea-

ger to keep the momentum going on this exciting project.”

The project application, which was submitted last year, is still under review, said Raffi Boloyan, the city’s planning manager.

Boloyan said the scoping session to start the draft environmental impact report, required under the California Environmental Quality Act, is scheduled for the March 12 Planning Commission meeting.

The project is requesting a general plan amendment, height exception and a density bonus among other approvals. The Design Review Board, the Planning Commission and the City Council will have to sign off on all approvals.

“This proposal embraces local, state and federal initiatives to revitalize downtown areas and to redevelop brownfields,” Charlesworth said. “We are proud of this pioneering proposal that provides an opportunity for public and private entities to collaborate on a development that will have significant and long-reaching benefits.”

BioMarin bought the San Rafael Corporate Center campus in 2014 and is the sole owner and the largest presence at the campus, where it maintains its corporate headquarters.

More information about the project is available at cityofsanrafael.org/999-3rd/.