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SAN RAFAEL

BioMarin submits expansion plan

Project with Whistlestop proposes offices, labs and housing for seniors

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BioMarin has filed an application for its downtown San Rafael expansion, a major mixed-use project that will include an affordable senior housing and activities center.

The pharmaceutical company's project at 999 Third St., a former Pacific Gas and Electric Co. property, includes two four-story lab and office buildings for BioMarin use, and a six-story, 67-unit senior housing and activities building for Whistlestop, a nonprofit serving older adults.

BioMarin submitted the application Friday with slight revisions after preliminary plans were reviewed by both the San Rafael Design Review Board and Planning Commission earlier this year.

Raffi Boloyan, the San Rafael planning manager, said that the City Council gets the final vote, but the proposal would first need the blessing of the Design Review Board and the Planning Commission. The first step for staff is to

BIOMARIN » PAGE 4



BioMarin's new complex in San Rafael, as depicted in a design rendering, would include two four-story buildings at the former PG&E property on Third Street.

COURTESY OF BIOMARIN

BioMarin

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review the completeness of the application before a hearing is scheduled to consider the project.

In September, the city hired environmental consultant Amy Skewes-Cox for \$277,771 at the expense of the applicant to begin the environmental review process, Boloyan said.

"Typically a project of this magnitude, you're looking at a year to a year-and-a-half process," he said.

"I think there is going to be a lot of attention to it because it is a key piece of downtown," he said. "People will be looking at the use and the mass, the scale and design of the structure."

BioMarin, which already occupies a sizable office complex in downtown San Rafael, owns the 3-acre lot. The company donated about 15,000 square feet of the northwest corner of the property to Whistlestop, where it plans to relocate its "active aging center" from its 930 Tamalpais Ave. site at the SMART train station.

Whistlestop officials are working on that portion of the project with Eden Housing, a Hayward-based affordable housing company. The Healthy Aging Center would occupy about 18,000 square feet of the two first floors of the building and would provide activities such as socialization, dancing, exercise and physical therapy and other health care services.

The remaining four floors would be dedicated to housing. One unit would be reserved for a live-in manager, while the remaining 66 would be open to rent for residents who are 62 and older and earn less than 60 percent of the area median income.

"We think this is a model for the future," said Joe O'Hehir, CEO of Whistlestop. "We want to bring health care payers and providers together in one place to improve the quality of life and get the ser-



COURTESY OF WHISTLESTOP

The BioMarin proposal for downtown San Rafael includes a 67-unit residential building, as depicted in a design rendering, for the nonprofit Whistlestop. One unit would be for a manager, and the rest for older or low-income residents.

vices all in an integrated care model."

The project overall would require a major environmental and design review permit approval, a use permit to allow residential uses in a commercial zone and a parking modification to allow the reduction of on-site parking from 293 required to about 50 spaces and other approvals.

Specifically for the Whistlestop project, the site would have only 12 parking spaces — 11 for Whistlestop use and one for the onsite residential manager. O'Hehir said residents would be asked in their leases to agree not to own cars.

O'Hehir said that Whistlestop provides transportation and that service will be available to all residents. He said the idea is to help residents save money on owning a car and to reduce traffic in and out of the busy downtown area.

The city zoning allows for only 25 units on the 15,000-square-foot site. Because all units will be offered at the affordable rate, the two nonprofits say that the project qualifies for three concessions under the state's density bonus law, which would allow them to

build the 70-foot building and 67 units.

The top floor of the building is set back in a "wedding cake" tiered fashion to address previous concerns about the visual impact from the street.

Project planners said Marin County has the oldest population in the Bay Area, and by 2030, one-third of Marin County residents will be age 60 or older.

Daniela Ogden, a spokeswoman for Eden, said there is an extreme housing shortage in the Bay Area, and that their properties are constantly receiving inquiries from prospective tenants who are in need of affordable housing.

"We are hearing this need and we want to address it," Ogden said. "To have this opportunity with Whistlestop is so wonderful because we see how vital housing is in the community and how people are struggling."

The BioMarin portion of the project calls for two east-west rectangular four-story office and lab buildings totaling 207,000 square feet on the east side of the 133,000-square-foot property bounded by Brooks, Lindaro, Third and

Second streets.

BioMarin spokeswoman Debra Charlesworth said that overall the project provides community benefits, including 3,500 square feet of retail space and 6,000 square feet of landscaped plaza open to the public during daytime hours at the corner of Third and Lindaro streets. She said the project promotes a vibrant downtown, creates a transit-oriented development and helps achieve the city's general plan goals.

"We are pleased at the opportunity to continue to grow in San Rafael, to contribute to the city's economic development and our development proposal that could create a win-win situation for the city of San Rafael, Whistlestop, Eden Properties and BioMarin," she wrote in an email. "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.