

Vision for parcel keyed to housing

City hails project as fighting sprawl

By Angelica Medaglia

GLOBE STAFF

The vistas around Wellington Circle in Medford encompass smokestacks, Boston's Prudential Tower, and a subdued Mystic River bordered by walking trails and trains rumbling by.

In this very industrial and commercial area of Medford, a large-scale residential neighborhood is to be raised on 16 acres of land. City officials hope it will bring thousands of new residents, creating a bustling cityscape of walkers, train riders, and office workers.

Early next month, National Development of Newton plans to publicly announce the start of the first phase: 292 apartments in two, six-story buildings along a newly built two-lane Main Street.

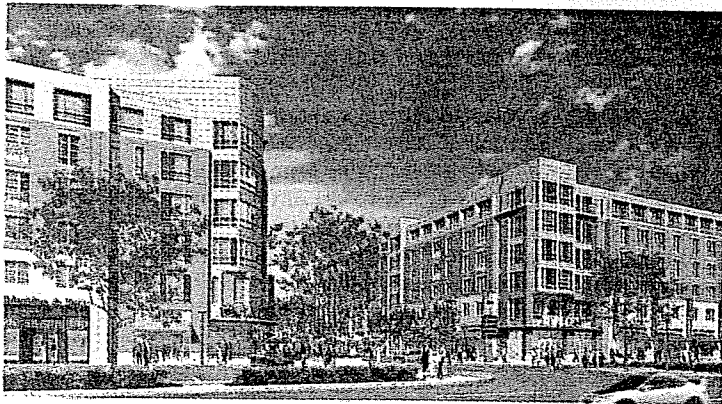
Medford has hailed the project,

which eventually will consist of 650 luxury rentals, retail and office space, a 190-room hotel, and 1,350-car parking facility. In future years, the access to a riverfront, marina and the MBTA Orange Line at Wellington Circle could encourage a movement to reduce residents' dependency on cars, which would mean less congestion and pollution for Medford, said Mayor Michael McGlynn.

"The theory is in line with what the Romney administration is promoting," said Phil Hailer, spokesman for the Office for Commonwealth Development.

The administration has issued, among other incentives, \$115 million of bonds in support of public and private projects that advance the governor's "Smart Growth" initiative, which aims to control urban sprawl by creating living and working environments for a cross section of people in locations

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The Boston Globe
10/14/04

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with access to public transportation.

One of the projects will use Dorchester's Ashmont train station, which will be renovated and its underutilized space sold off for apartments and commercial real estate. In addition, Lawrence mill owners will take advantage of a soon-to-be transportation center to promote housing redevelopment.

The Wellington Circle plan, called Station Landing, will not receive any state aid, said Ted Tye, a managing partner for National Development. The company will rent its one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments at market prices, and unlike the governor's Smart Growth initiative, it does not aim for a mixed-income housing.

"We had a 16-acre site which had lots of advantages — a river, a marina, MBTA access, a great park system, good roads," said Tye. "It also had the history where not

much good had happened."

A few years ago, that land was in limbo. Its former owner, Cabot, Cabot & Forbes of New England Inc. had invested money to build a suburban office park. The company raised one building, but abandoned the project when the local appetite for commercial real estate dwindled in the 1980s. In 2002, National Development bought the property and worked with the city on plans for a large-scale complex, oriented mainly toward housing.

There won't be any significant affordable housing at Station Landing, but officials note that when Cabot, Cabot & Forbes was negotiating its project, it provided the city with money for 30 affordable-housing units, infrastructure, and green space along the river front.

Moreover, said McGlynn, "The city is getting a great deal out this project: \$1.4 million in linkage money."

Medford has enforced a local law since 1989 that requires projects with more than six units

or 10,000 square feet of space to pay a "linkage" fee. In this case, National Development will pay \$3,900 for each apartment built, plus an additional amount for 70,000 square feet of new retail space, producing about \$1.4 million for the first phase.

These days, the Wellington Circle area "street life" is found mainly in the parking lots of Costco, Home Depot, Old Navy, and the cluster of other stores in a mall near the Everett border.

But city officials say the project that National Development has presented — the largest residential endeavor at the moment in Medford — will enliven the area.

"People are already very much interested in securing housing, even though they [National Development] haven't really started," said McGlynn. "Quite honestly, we've been searching to attract restaurants, and this is going to accelerate the process."

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