

DEVELOPER TAKING CUES FROM NORTH BAY NEIGHBORS FOR OLD AGILENT SITE GETTING 'SMART' ABOUT GROWTH

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PAGE: E1

Codding Enterprises is moving forward with plans to transform the former Agilent Technologies property in Rohnert Park using "smart growth" concepts, a development model increasingly in vogue in planning circles.

Brad Baker, president and chief executive of Codding Enterprises, revealed new details of the project at the North Bay Symposium on Smart Growth on Friday in Windsor.

The project will feature a public plaza, like the Healdsburg square, surrounded by residences, he said. The plan also calls for a small boutique hotel, with 50 to 100 rooms that could lodge people who come to the proposed Green Music Center, next to Sonoma State University.

"There's an opportunity to make Rohnert Park the first destination of Wine Country," Baker said.

More than 200 people attended the symposium in Windsor, sponsored by the Leadership Institute for Ecology and the Economy, a Sonoma County nonprofit group. The conference attracted architects, planners, developers and builders and members of the environmental community. Immediately following the conference, attendees toured Windsor Town Green, which is considered a model of smart growth and the redevelopment of a blighted area.

Smart growth developments are the antithesis of sprawl and conventional tract homes. The old Agilent site, slated to be called Sonoma Mountain Village, is envisioned as a community where people can live, work, shop and enjoy leisure activities within easy walking distance of each other and mass transit, including a planned train station a half mile away.

Baker said Friday he is negotiating with two companies to relocate at the former Agilent site. One is a "high-tech R&D" company and the other a financial services company, he said. Each would occupy 140,000 square feet of building space.

Agilent sold its 200-acre site and four massive buildings for \$38.5 million, according to Sonoma County records. The buyers have not disclosed the purchase price.

According to a preliminary design plan submitted to Rohnert Park officials this week, Sonoma Mountain Village would include 1,800 homes, 350,000 square feet of office and research and development uses, 100,000 square feet of light industrial uses and 75,000 square feet of retail stores.

Rohnert Park Mayor Jake Mackenzie, who attended Friday's conference, said he remains excited about Codding's plans for the old Agilent site, but cautioned that it will require a zoning change,

general plan amendment and environmental review. And, he noted, an undeveloped portion of site includes potential habitat for the endangered California tiger salamander.

Mackenzie was unwilling to predict how long it will take to get approvals or build out Sonoma Mountain Village.

“It's a major infill development. Rohnert Park has never had to deal with something of this immensity,” he said.

Ron Sundergill, president of the Leadership Institute, said smart growth principles are becoming increasingly accepted.

“A lot of developers are getting on the bandwagon, like Coddling,” he said.

Laura Hall, a principal in Fisher & Hall urban planners, said Sonoma County is at the forefront of smart growth projects, reflected in Windsor Town Green and Petaluma's renaissance.

In particular she touted a different approach to conventional zoning -- which Petaluma has adopted -- a “form based” code that concentrates on the visual aspect of development and puts less emphasis on actual use of a property. The approach concentrates on building height and bulk, facade treatments, location of parking and relationships of building to the street and one another.

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