

# SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

## City gives go-ahead for major mixed-use development

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A 70-acre site at the end of South St. Francis Drive will house a multiuse development approved Wednesday by the city. The project is outside the city limits and was approved by the County Commission, but it will tap city water and sewer lines that will loop under Interstate 25 from East Rodeo Park Drive. Luis Sánchez Saturno/The New Mexican

The city of Santa Fe has given final approval to a mixed-use apartment and commercial project on a high-profile parcel just south of Interstate 25 at St. Francis Drive.

The 70-acre St. Francis South Development is outside the city limits, but it plans to connect to city water and sewer lines that will loop under Interstate 25 from East Rodeo Park Drive. That area is home to medical and professional offices, including Eye Associates, Genzyme Genetics and a Christus surgical center.

City Council members approved the utility extensions Wednesday so Vegas Verde LLC can move forward with road, sewer and other land-preparation work.

Developers David Gurule and Ernest Romero of Phase One Real Estate were not available for comment Wednesday.

“The project will consist of mixed-use space including offices, warehouses, medical facilities and multi-family residential lots,” according to a memo from Nick Schiavo, city public utilities director, to city councilors.

More specifically, the filing indicates planning for 200 apartments; a 50,000-square-foot medical rehabilitation center; 300,000 square feet of warehouse space; and 112,500 square feet of leased office space. Warehouse space is in especially short supply throughout New Mexico.

City councilors who heard the proposal in committee — and have voted against multifamily projects — said there remains a need for new apartment units.

Though the South St. Francis Drive area is adjacent to an interstate highway, it has been passed over for many projects that instead went to areas off Airport Road and Cerrillos Road near the Walmart Supercenter. Water and sewer lines already are in place there.

The St. Francis South parcel has been fenced off for years, but many people still use it to gather firewood.

The master plan for the project was approved more than two years ago by Santa Fe County Commissioners, who control zoning and land use outside city limits.

During a county public hearing in January 2014, many residents who live along Rabbit Road between Old Pecos Trail and Richards Avenue complained of increased traffic and loss of their bucolic lifestyle.

Rabbit Road at one time ended in dirt and gravel driveways used exclusively by property owners, many of whom are extended families that have lived there for generations with horses and other livestock.

The road was extended in 2008 when the county approved the Oshara Village subdivision on Richards Avenue near Santa Fe Community College. It was a way to reach the college and the growing neighborhoods of Rancho Viejo and new schools, such as the Academy for Technology and the Classics.

“Rabbit Road, up until four years ago was a dead-end road with 500 cars a day,” area resident Don Devito told the county commissioners in 2014. “Now we’re the main artery between St. Francis and Richards with a car count of over 6,000 and there’s been no road improvements or traffic calming done.”

Also at the 2014 hearing, Baron Wolman said the project is vastly out of scale with what is a rural stretch of the county. “The question is really the effect this enormous development is going to have on really an entire area, thousands of people, hundreds of families.”

But county commissioners said the area is growing and would not be rural much longer. The location of the land adjacent to city limits and I-25 made it a good fit for the proposed uses. They approved the project in a 5-0 vote.

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