

Hazel Park races forward

Streamlined approvals pays off with condo project

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Hazel Park's largest residential project in 25 years is the first significant development reviewed through a streamlined approvals process designed to aid older cities.

Fairview Place condominiums – five two-story buildings modeled after developer Michael Furnari's Fairview Estates condos on University Drive in Pontiac – will be built on the city's last two vacant acres, at 1561 E. Woodward Heights at Dequindre Road.

Furnari, of Fairview Land Development, closed in mid-April on the \$400,000 purchase from the city, said Linda Williams, Hazel Park management and economic development assistant.

The property was put on the market late last year without a request for proposal process. Furnari was one of a couple of developers interested in the land, approximately a half-mile from the Hazel Park Raceway.

Hazel Park is one of six Detroit suburbs – along with Southfield, Eastpointe, River Rouge, Taylor and Ypsilanti – chosen in February for the Michigan Suburbs Alliance's Redevelopment Ready certification program. The designation is meant to expedite site plan and planning processes and signal to developers that inner-ring suburbs have dealt with issues that typically impede redevelopment of older cities.

"We are trying to create a development friendly atmosphere without sacrificing design and character elements that citizens support," said Conan Smith, executive director of the Ferndale-based Michigan Suburbs Alliance.

Furnari and city officials already have hammered out a development agreement, as well as landscap-

ing and parking plans. A site plan is expected to be considered at a public hearing May 9.

Furnari said he can see the difference in the city's perspective and approvals process as he works with Hazel Park to get Fairview Place off the ground. "It seems they are more open to development."

Hazel Park City Manager Ed Klobucher said the city is receptive to developers willing to assemble property for commercial and residential projects.

Fairview Place will be Furnari's third major work in Oakland County, including two in Pontiac, where Fairview Estates has sold out the first two of 10 planned buildings.

Furnari would not disclose the estimated cost of the Hazel Park development.

Fairview Place will offer two- and three-bedroom, 1,100- to 1,500-square-foot units beginning at about \$150,000. The turn-key units will include appliances and window treatments. Each unit of brick and siding has no more than one flight of stairs.

The condo development will be enclosed with brick piers and wrought iron. One- and two-car garages will be attached at the rear of the condominiums, Furnari said.

The developer has no particular target market but expects potential buyers to be current Hazel Park residents.

"I think we will be the first guys in town and that's a plus," he said. "The absorption rate will be fast in Hazel Park."

Hazel Park is not a new market for Furnari and his father, Michael Furnari Sr., who have redeveloped about 12 homes on Bennett Street.

Despite the community's age, Furnari said he is encouraged by the city's increased growth in value over the past few years. In



SUZANNE YURENKA

Developer Michael Furnari: 'The absorption rate will be fast in Hazel Park.'

2002, the city led the tri-county area with a 14.4 percent increase in state equalized value and has maintained double-digit increases since, Klobucher said.

The price points for Fairview Place are close to the average \$110,000-\$120,000 housing prices in Hazel Park, a level Klobucher said is promising for redevelopment and an influx of new busi-

ness and residents.

The city has seen an average 30 new houses built annually for the past three or four years as residents tear down and rebuild or sell extra land on double lots, Klobucher said.

■ *Joanne Maliszewski covers real estate and development for Oakland Business Review.*