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Manzanita's first pocket neighborhood on track

Phase I of proposed development could be completed as early June 2012

By Dave Fisher
The Citizen

So far, so good for developer Jim Pentz, who plans to build a “pocket neighborhood” on land he owns on the northeast corner of Classic St. (Ted Erickson Way) and Dorcas Lane in Manzanita. The Manzanita City Council approved the first reading of an ordinance that clears the way for the first phase of Classic Cottages, which represents six of a total of 24 units that will ultimately be built in the second and third phases of the project.

Pentz, owner of Manzanita Investment Properties, LLC, and architect Ross Chapin pitched the pocket neighborhood idea to the council in August. Pocket neighborhoods, by design, afford neighbors the opportunity to get to know each other and foster a strong sense of community, Chapin explained in his August presentation. While the concept isn't new, it is new to Manzanita and Pentz and Chapin hope to make it a reality for this north Oregon coast community.

Pentz purchased the Manzanita property in 2006 and developed lots for future development. “My thought initially was to build a combination of duplexes or maybe 30 or 40 condominiums units,” Pentz said.

With a changing market and downturn in the economy, Pentz held off and began looking at other options, acknowledging that he wasn't a “condo type of guy.” Ultimately, his research led him to the pocket neighborhoods and the work of Washington-based Ross Chapin Architects.

The Manzanita Planning Commission subsequently approved a tentative subdivision plan to replat the area of the existing subdivision where Phase I of the planned development is to be built, thereby accommodating Pentz's plan for a pocket neighborhood. With the council's approval of the ordinance allowing for the change as of its first reading Dec. 7, the planning commission will continue its review of the subdivision in January as it considers the final plat for Phase I.

In his remarks to the council, City Manager Jerry Taylor noted that the proposed pocket neighborhood had met with no opposition so far, with the consensus among city officials that it is a good match for Manzanita. One area of concern is the notion of creating a sense of community with the pocket neighborhood considering the fact that 70 percent of the homes in Manzanita are second homes.

“Do you envision these homes as second homes?” Councilor Leila Salmon asked Pentz, who was on hand at the Dec. 7 meeting.

“We'll have to see how that plays out,” Pentz responded. “I would hope they would be permanent homes.” Pentz added that for owners who wished to rent their home, they would be required get a permit with the city rental and contract with a local property management firm to eliminate problems associated with vacation rentals. Ultimately, Pentz said, it would be up to the homeowners of each of the three clusters of homes to decide if rentals would be allowed.

Once the final plat is approved, which is expected in January, building could commence quickly as the infrastructure from the original subdivision is already in place. Pentz looks to have the first four of the six planned units of Phase I completed by June, according to Taylor. The estimated price for the cottage-like units, 800 to 1,600 square feet in size, will range from \$300,000 to \$400,000. Of the initial six homes clustered around a shared commons area, three have garages and the remainder off-street parking; something that Pentz believes works well. “There’s a lot of homes on the coast that don’t have garages,” he noted.

In addition, Phase I will be completely landscaped with each cottage having its own private yard surrounded by a low fence.

“This concept (smaller homes clustered around common areas) looks to be the wave of the future,” said Mayor Garry Bullard.

“The plan is to go slow and do it right,” said Pentz, who opted to test market conditions by developing Phase I now instead of all three at once.

Once Phase I is completed, Pentz will have up to two years to begin development of the second phase or explain to the city why he isn’t moving ahead. The same goes for the third and final phase of the 24-unit project.