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February 1, 2017

Group appeals plan for apartments on Red Robin restaurant's old perch

By BRIAN MILLER
Journal staff reporter

On the day after Christmas — Boxing Day — the developers who want to put apartments on the former Red Robin site at 3272 Fuhrman Ave. E. received a present of sorts.

The city issued conditional approvals for the project and a determination of non-significance, clearing the way for a master use permit application.

However, just before the appeals period closed in January, Portage Bay Place Neighbors & Friends filed an appeal with the city Hearing Examiner, adding another chapter to the redevelopment saga of a prominent site in Eastlake.

Developers Michael Heijer and Robert Hardy purchased the 15,620-square-foot property in 2014 for \$2.8 million. It is at the south end of the University Bridge, and was the site of the first Red Robin restaurant, which opened under that name in 1969.

b9 Architects has designed what it calls the Robin's Nest, and the project has gone through two rounds of design review.

Two linked buildings are proposed with a total of 61 residential units, 2,000 square feet of retail and underground parking for 21 vehicles. The two- and three-story buildings would be separated by an L-shaped courtyard.

The smaller building would have retail space with apartments above at the corner of Fuhrman and Eastlake Avenue East, and a slightly higher roofline than the larger building. The larger building would rise four levels above grade, or about 60 feet, from Portage Bay Place East. Both would have roof decks.

The total project size would be about 50,000 square feet.

Parking would be accessed from Portage Bay Place East, a narrow dead-end street serving houseboats and a few waterfront businesses.

Among the grounds for the neighborhood group's appeal are whether that street requires sidewalks, or has enough room for vehicles to turn around and garbage to be collected.

The group's lawyer also cites design departures, balcony overhangs above the street, an excessively steep driveway, the lack of an environmental impact statement (which the city did not require), and the lack of proper approvals for a proposed public stair connecting Portage Bay Place with Fuhrman. The stairs would be immediately east of the bridge.

No date has yet been set for the hearing examiner, said Heijer. He said he expected the appeals process could take from one to eight weeks. "We send all the lawyers and architects and experts to duke it out. I think we're gonna agree to a few changes."

Once permits are in place, Heijer said construction would take 18-20 months.

Heijer and Hardy originally said they hoped to break ground last year and be finished this year.

"It's been a two-year process," said Heijer, though he called that unsurprising, given the city's backlog of permits to review.

He expects to see "some bar or pub or restaurant" in the commercial space, which will be built to accommodate such a tenant. Although it's too soon to name potential operators, he said, "We've had quite a few people we've talked to."

Heijer is president of GranCorp, which was originally the U.S. investment arm of a Swedish firm but is now privately held. GranCorp acquires and redevelops commercial property on the West Coast.

Hardy's Hardy Development Co. is experienced in multifamily and single-family housing. Hardy is also currently planning 383 units in three buildings at 1203 E. Spruce St., in a complex that will be called First



b9 Architects designed the Robin's Nest, with 61 units, retail and underground parking in two linked buildings separated by a courtyard.

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Central Station.

Here is the Robin's Nest team: general contractor Saco Construction, Malsam Tsang Structural Engineering, Blueline Group (civil engineer), Karen Kiest Landscape Architects and PanGeo (geotechnical).

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