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## Proposed Mixed-Use Project Gets Encouraging Feedback

By Cathy Tyson

Preliminary drawings from a developer working with a senior living facility operator were recently presented to the Design Review Commission and received generally positive responses.

Merrill Gardens, SRM Development and Wattenbarger Architects presented their initial plans to garner feedback on a mixed-use project that will tentatively include 72 independent and assisted apartments for seniors that has a memory care unit, and approximately 6,000 square feet of retail space on the street level fronting Mt. Diablo Boulevard at Second Street. Taking advantage of the upward sloping lot, the drive-in entrance to Merrill Gardens would be located on Second Street.

"We are just getting started with the planning process, this was our initial study session with Design Review," said Ryan Leong, Merrill Gardens Development Manager. He estimates it could take "anywhere from four to six weeks to prepare a formal application."

The development company has owned the land at the corner of Mt. Diablo and Second Street for the last three years. The site is made up of six parcels totaling 1.35 acres that housed Kennan Heinz, Yan's restaurant and a couple of office buildings behind. The rear of the project would be adjacent to an existing apartment complex.

If approved, this will be the site of the Merrill Gardens senior housing facility along with retail space on the ground floor. Photo C. Tyson

If developed, this would be the second senior housing facility in the immediate area. Just a couple of blocks down Mt. Diablo, Eden Housing has been approved to build a 46-unit affordable senior housing complex.

Design Review Commissioners liked the proposed Arts and Crafts design, along with the retail component and inviting public space along Mt. Diablo. The project includes a generous courtyard, underground parking accessible from Second Street, a landscaped rooftop deck and protection of the mature oak tree at the corner.

Merrill Gardens is the second largest private owner/operator of independent and assisted living facilities in California, with eighteen locations across the state. SRM Development is a construction company and developer that specializes in senior housing facilities.

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