



Bay Meadows racetrack site in San Mateo is ready for houses

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A residential neighborhood centered on the Hillsdale Caltrain station is planned for the site of the former Bay Meadows racetrack.

By this time next year, housing could begin to rise where horses once ran in San Mateo.

Three years after the demolition of the Bay Meadows racetrack, the beginnings of a street grid are visible on the 83-acre site south of the county fairgrounds, and water and drainage lines are in place. Construction on the first housing is expected to begin next year, and plans for improvements to the largest park in the development will be up for approval in the next few months.

First approved in 2005 in the face of heated opposition from those hoping to preserve the 75-year-old racetrack, the Bay Meadows project is a massive multiuse, transit-oriented development centered on the Hillsdale Caltrain station.

Developer Wilson Meany Sullivan is currently working to find a builder for the first 156 units of housing, expected to be town homes located at the northern end of the development, according to project manager Jenelle Ball. Construction should be under way by the end of summer, and people could potentially move in as soon as the end of next year.

“That might be a little optimistic, but I think it can happen,” Mayor Jack Matthews said. Accompanying the housing will be temporary improvements to a 12-acre park that also sits at the northern end of the project.

While another 3 acres of smaller parks will be built and designed entirely by the developer, the city had expected to design and build the 12-acre park itself, with a \$1 million contribution from the developer. However, planning stalled due to the poor economy.

“At the time when the city’s overall finances started to really suffer, it was determined that it was probably not good timing to continue to talk about building a new park,” Parks and Recreation Director Sheila Canzian said.

Instead, the developer will make interim improvements to the park to have recreational facilities in place when the new housing is constructed, Canzian said.

The park includes a retention pond that will provide a water feature, and the improvements will likely

include playing fields and a walking trail.

Plans for the park are expected to come before the Parks and Recreation Commission in October or November, Canzian said.

The Bay Meadows project saw one brief delay in 2009 when the developer re-evaluated the phasing of construction in light of the struggling economy, but it remains on pace, Ball said. The 18-year development agreement with the city allows the developer some leeway to adjust the amount of housing, retail and commercial space in response to market conditions.

Down the line, development could potentially run into delays if plans to build an expanded Hillsdale Caltrain station and two grade separations eliminating road-level rail crossings do not move forward. The project's approval depended in part on the assumption that the grade separations would mitigate traffic impacts.

While plans for the new station exist, there is no funding and no project in the works at present, Caltrain spokeswoman Christine Dunn said.

Off the ground

Homes could spring up within the next year where the Bay Meadows racetrack once stood.

83.4 Acreage of development

1,250 Units of housing

1.25M Square footage of commercial space

150,000 Square footage of retail space

15 Acreage of parks, including one 12-acre space

18 Number of years in development agreement

Source: City of San Mateo

<http://www.sfexaminer.com/local/peninsula/2011/09/bay-meadows-race-track-site-san-mateo-ready-houses#ixzz1hD8Co4M5>