

1,000 units, near car-free, planned in Hayward

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Hayward, an East Bay suburb not known for pushing progressive ideals, quietly has laid the groundwork for a radical experiment in environmentally conscious living - a nearly car-free housing development.

Quarry Village is a proposed 1,000-unit neighborhood that would fill a former quarry near Cal State East Bay and 1 1/2 miles from the Hayward BART Station. It's the brainchild of Sherman Lewis, a professor emeritus in political science at Cal State East Bay who created a nonprofit organization to promote the idea with local officials, investors and developers.

According to Lewis, 69, people would rent or buy eco-friendly, garage-free homes in the densely built community with interconnected pathways. Residents would receive transit passes with the cost of their home but could pay separately for one of just 100 parking spaces.

A village square would feature a grocery store and other services. Shuttles would ferry passengers to the campus and BART.

While Lewis said he already has 100 people signed up to buy a home if the village is ever built, he is not funding the project himself, and it's unclear whether real estate investors will take a risk on his unconventional proposition.

'Huge pent-up demand'

"There's a huge pent-up demand for this, and I think it would make a lot of money," Lewis said. "But lenders have to be interested. If they're not, it will fail."

The village pushes the envelope of the "smart growth" philosophy, which de-emphasizes the automobile by creating new development near public transit. In recent years, a handful of projects in Europe, the United States and elsewhere have discouraged auto use by narrowing streets, cutting parking and pushing transit alternatives. Projects also are reducing energy use and emissions from building materials, heating and cooling systems.

Few places in the world have made a nearly car-free development a reality, however. One is in Freiburg, Germany, a city of 215,000 that has a history of left-leaning causes, including Germany's anti-nuclear and environmental movements of the 1960s.

The Vauban development in Freiburg is a 6,000-resident community completed in 2006. It has two large garages on the development's periphery, and residents can purchase a parking space for an additional \$40,000. Seventy percent of the residents don't own cars.

Car-free a tough sell

But advocates for car-reduced living in the United States face enormous hurdles.

First, most U.S. suburbs don't have the widespread public transit infrastructure necessary to make such communities desirable to Americans, who are not yet giving up their cars in large numbers. Second, real estate investors and developers generally are risk-averse and aren't ready to bet that enough buyers are prepared to go without cars.

In Vauban, an electric streetcar runs through the community's only main street and connects riders with downtown, a university and several business parks. At Quarry Village, a main public transportation line would be more than a mile away.

"I'm skeptical that you can eliminate cars in a development that is not directly on top of transit," said Jeff Loux, a land-use expert and UC Davis professor who has visited Vauban. "You have to make the alternative almost as convenient and, hopefully, cheaper than cars."

But Loux said a Quarry Village model just might work if its shuttles are so frequent that residents don't feel inconvenienced. It's hard for anyone to really know unless the idea is tried in the United States, he said.

While the Hayward experiment might be a longshot, it has made major strides.

On May 28, the Hayward Planning Commission approved new zoning that allows for a higher level of housing per acre at the 30-acre quarry than what is permitted in the rest of the city, and that cuts way back on the amount of parking required.

Special zoning approved

New residential development in California commonly requires two parking spaces per housing unit. Under the new Hayward zoning, there is no minimum number of spaces, only maximums - 1.3 spaces per studio or one-bedroom unit, to 1.5 spaces for a two-unit or larger home.

And while Lewis does not have previous real estate experience, he is receiving help with a financial plan from energy-efficient home builder Zeta Communities, which has experienced builders and planners on staff. Another advantage for Quarry Village is that the land is owned by Caltrans, which, after scrapping plans for a freeway extension, wants to unload the property.

Other Bay Area cities already have crafted land-use policies to push development and renovations in a more environmentally conscious direction.

2 big projects in s.f.

San Francisco is partnering with developers on two huge redevelopment projects, one at Treasure Island and another that comprises both Candlestick Point and the Hunters Point Shipyard. Together they could add 36,000 residents to the city in the next 20 years.

Neither project includes single-family housing, and each is designed with energy conservation in mind. Plans include allowing buyers to purchase parking separately from their homes and requiring them to buy transit passes. The total number of residential parking spaces in each plan is cut back from most new development, but not nearly as much as at Quarry Village.

Michael Cohen, who manages the city's development projects, said he believes the San Francisco projects are innovative as well as realistic.

"We believe that what we are trying to do is at the very edge of environmental sustainability while still being financially feasible," Cohen said.

Others are convinced that investors will give something like Quarry Village a shot sooner rather than later.

"The market will test whether it's viable," said Gerrit Knapp, at the National Center for Smart Growth at the University of Maryland. "There are segments of the population that will find this attractive; no car is the extreme, but less car is hardly novel."

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<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/06/08/BA2D17THSA.DTL>

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