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### A plan for 'Granny's Field' : Architect proposes senior housing for crime-ridden school property off Turnpike Road

By ELIZABETH HAMILTON, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER  
January 19, 2014 12:15 AM

A proposed senior housing development for the Tatum property, a 23-acre site between San Marcos High and El Camino Elementary schools, has prompted the Santa Barbara Unified School District board of trustees to seek a way to put the vacant land to use.

The district acquired the land, also called "Granny's Field," in 1965 for a junior high school, but it remained undeveloped and is known in the neighborhood as a haven of the homeless and infested with crime.

But the school board is expected to issue a public request for proposals for developing the site off Turnpike Road as early as the end of January or beginning of February, board Vice President Ed Heron said.

The school district's action was spurred by Detlev Peikert, principal and founder of Peikert & RRM Design Group, of Santa Barbara, who presented a conceptual plan at the board's Dec. 10 meeting.

This was the first proposal for the property since 2007, when the board explored options for developing the site as the state's first for-sale, workforce housing project for district teachers. The project fell to the wayside due to the recession, Mr. Heron said.

Mr. Peikert, who took part in the previous request for proposals, began designing his newest proposal in 2012, when Santa Barbara County began an attempt to "upzone," or increase the number of dwellings per acre, some 14 acres of the Tatum property. The idea has been opposed by neighbors who fear high-density housing will

increase traffic and clog roads.

Mr. Peikert saw this as a ripe opportunity to reopen discussions and began designing a development that would appeal to the board's desire to lease the property for revenue, satisfy neighbors' concerns about traffic, and augment safety.

Thus, the architect chose senior housing, an option he believes suits the wishes and concerns of the board and the neighborhood.

"Seniors typically don't drive as much and they don't drive at the peak hour," Mr. Peikert said. "That's why the impact of a senior project is least likely to have any significant impact than, say, a family housing project would typically have."

He noted the senior population is growing dramatically and the county does not have sufficient housing to meet their needs.

"The senior population in California is expected to almost double over the next 20 years or so," Mr. Peikert said. "Approximately 1,600 people turn 65 every day in California."

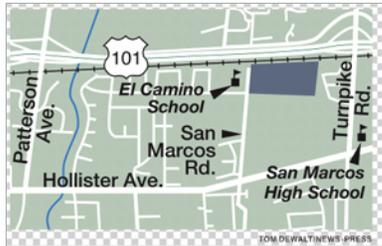
His proposal includes a two-story clubhouse, a pool, independent living homes and a memory-care and assisted-living center.

As further incentive to the board, he suggests students in the nursing program at San Marcos High School could incorporate visits to the memory-care center into their curriculum.



El Camino Elementary School students frequently cross the Tatum property on their way to and from school.

STEVE MALONE/NEWS-PRESS



Architect Detlev Peikert walks the property on Turnpike Road.

MIKE ELIASON/NEWS-PRESS



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Neighbors seem to favor the idea.

"I would be very happy to see it (Tatum property) developed and cleaned up," said Ellie Altomare, who has lived nearby on San Simeon Road for 16 years.



"There's various homeless guys that live in that area and many of them are mentally ill. It's not your regular guy who lost his job and is just pitching his tent."

Mrs. Altomare said she and her husband used to walk their German shepherd through the property, but no longer feel safe doing so. They worry about their two children, ages 15 and 8, and the students at San Marcos and El Camino.

"It's so close to San Marcos, I just worry every time I see a teenager walk through there," she said. "I go 'Oh my gosh! I hope they don't get raped!' There are a lot of crazy people in there."

She and her husband agreed senior housing would be a good option because it would not increase traffic or water use levels, though they prefer any kind of development to the homeless encampments and violence occurring on the property now.

"The reason there is concern about that (homelessness and crime) now is because it's a vacant site," said Mr. Peikert. "There's lots of trees so people go there to do things they probably shouldn't be doing. There's some homeless people, they (police) try to control it, but it's hard to control."

The plan includes 10 acres of open space where environmentally sensitive areas will remain undeveloped and accessible to the public by trails.

"With all these people there managing and overseeing the activities on the site, you won't have the kinds of things that are going on now," Mr. Peikert said.

While board members are enthusiastic about the proposal, they insist on a competitive, open process before choosing a development plan for the publicly owned property.

"I absolutely believe it does need to be a public, open process," said board member Monique Limon. "That's very important to me."

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