
Business

The Register-Guard

Hult plans 120 homes

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The Register-Guard

Published: August 26, 2008 12:00AM



2fORM Architecture

A mix of town homes and single-family homes are planned for a subdivision, "The Jewel on Bailey Hill."

The Hult Center was named after her father, and now Gretchen Hult Pierce is planning a monument to her mother, Jewel: A 120-unit subdivision on the family's 35-acre spread on a north-facing slope of Bailey Hill.

Pierce, 63, started planning the subdivision in recent years after her mother's death at the age of 90.

The thicket of houses will sprout on ground where she grew up, where her mother and father built a home so elegant it was featured in magazine spreads and where the first-ever home swimming pool was installed in Eugene.

The mailbox across narrow, rural Louis Lane where the home is tucked still bears her father's name, although he's two decades gone. Pierce said she's so attached to the property she couldn't bear what would happen if she sold the land outright, even though that would be the most lucrative course.

"The biggest return — by far — is simply selling very expensive single family home sites and building McMansions on them," she said. "That's just what (developers) do. That isn't what I wanted to have happen up there."

Instead, Pierce gave her project the euphonious name "The Jewel on Bailey Hill," hired a design team that could deliver on her goals of creating a green and economically diverse neighborhood, and set about building what she hopes will be a legacy.

"Being a local resident and being real involved in this community, I'm not like: 'Just do it, sell it and get out of town.' That's not what we do," Pierce said. "It's going to live way beyond me and I'd like to feel really proud about it."

Pierce said she's taking her time. She doesn't expect to break ground until 2009 or 2010. She still has a ways to go through the city's planned unit development approval process. A public hearing is scheduled for October.

The lives of Jewel and Nils Hult were built on a foundation of timber. Both their parents were sawmill owners, and the couple continued in the family business until the 1960s, when they sold their mills and went into real estate development.

Architect Richard Shugar, who was hired to transform their estate into a subdivision, drew up plans that reflect their background with Northwest vernacular architecture, which includes using exposed wood beams and siding and regional stone in foundations, terraces and retaining walls.

His plans are for houses that are meant to cleave to the sloped curve of the Hults' land. House buyers aren't going to find any "super pad one level floor plans" in this development.

"The buildings engage the landscape; they engage the site," said Shugar, who's principal at 2fORM Architecture in Eugene. "They step up with the contours instead of sticking out or being completely buried. Instead of being objects on the landscape, they're objects in the landscape."

The development includes a mixture of townhouses and single family houses. The residences are clustered together to leave ground for open space and an interior trail system, which is to connect on the southwest side of the property with Eugene's Ridgeline Trail, a public trail that meanders across the South Hills.

It's not yet clear whether the public will have access to the Ridgeline Trail through Pierce's development. She said she'll leave that up to a homeowners' association that will form as buyers inhabit the planned houses. "It's not a decision I can make or should make," Pierce said.

Pierce is planning to remake the sprawling brick house her parents built in 1952 into a community center. The house was designed by Architect Clare K. Hamlin, who also designed the old Eugene Public Library building on 13th Avenue.

Pierce is envisioning future weddings, birthday parties and family get-togethers in what was once her childhood home. It has a large outdoor kitchen and a swimming pool, although the latter is likely to go because of cost and liability issues.

"This pool was the first swimming pool in Eugene," Pierce said. "It was built in 1952. Nobody in Oregon built swimming pools, so we had to get a company from California. They would only come up if they had two pools to do, so they put in the Eugene Country Club pool and our pool at the same time — interesting little factoid there — so it's very old."

Pierce plans to fill in the pool and build a fountain or a playground, or perhaps a water feature where children can stomp and splash.

The property was designated in the Metro Plan — the regional blueprint for future growth — for low density residential neighborhoods. The zoning was set for that purpose earlier this year when the property was annexed into the city.

Neighborhood leaders say Pierce would bring a welcome break from the pattern of development if she builds some affordable housing on the hillside.

So far the flat lands in the Churchill Neighborhood hold the lower priced, older — and sometimes ramshackle — housing, while the \$600,000 to \$1 million houses are up on the hilltop off Hawkins Lane.

"It's good to have — on the hills — a mix of incomes, but she hasn't really said what the costs of (the houses) are going to be," neighborhood Chairman Alan Buck said. "If the least expensive town home is \$250,000 and the highest is \$700,000 — that's not really a mix of incomes."

Pierce said the hillside where she grew up is a wonderful area for families with school playgrounds and open spaces nearby. "It would be really unfortunate if young families could not afford to live there," she said

The smallest houses in the planned development will be 1,400 to 1,500 square feet, Pierce said, but it's too soon to estimate how much they're going to cost.

"Until we start to price the lots and the homes and frankly get close to building them, I'm not going to be able to tell you that," Pierce said "I'd just like to have some housing that appeals to the average incomer — although that will be a real challenge in this county for sure."

The arrival of 120 new houses on the pastoral hillside will be a tough adjustment for some nearby residents.

Pierce and her representative Carol Schirmer have asked to present plans for the housing development Wednesday at the Churchill Area Neighborhood Association meeting. “This is a big deal. It’s important for people to know what’s coming,” Pierce said.

Buck, who represents the neighborhood, said he is pleased with Pierce’s willingness to take the time: “She’s in direct contrast to some of the other developers in our neighborhood, who want nothing to do with us. She has been forthcoming from the get-go. It’s nice. It really is.

“People like to know what’s going on in their backyard, and having the developers come and talk to them eases a lot of tension. Their curiosity gets satisfied and they say ‘Well, OK, that’s not so bad, really.’ ”

On the other hand, neighbors who live on Louis Lane say they’ve been unable to get Pierce’s ear. Richard Hardt, for instance, said his two kids along with other neighborhood children ride their bicycles on Louis Lane and adding the traffic without changes to the road will be dangerous.

He wants Pierce and the city to remake the intersection at Bailey Hill Road and Louis Lane to make the streets connect at right angles, to put in a traffic light to prevent close calls with parents dropping off students at nearby Kennedy Middle School and/or put traffic calming on Louis Lane to prevent cars from speeding down slope.

Hardt said he presented detailed plans to the developer’s representative, but waited months and got a perfunctory reply.

“It’s nice she’s being helpful with the neighborhood association, but we’re the people who actually live on the street,” he said.

“There are real opportunities for cooperative, constructive planning here, but so far they haven’t shown any interest in working with us.”

Pierce said the Kennedy school drop off congestion is a long-term issue that’s not related to the development.

“The transportation folks did not see any major issues here,” she said. “The city has reviewed it very carefully and also the public works people. If anybody was concerned, they would have raised a flag long before now.”

Some other nearby residents say they are saddened by what they see as the loss of the hillside’s rural feel. A herd of deer are wont to eat and lounge in the apple orchard in Hult family’s front yard.

Joanna and John Fisher have raised chicken and sheep on 5½ acres nearby along Louis Lane. They liked the land and they liked the quiet, Joanna said. Since learning about The Jewel on Bailey Hill, they bought land out on McKenzie View Drive.

“We are taking our sheep and moving,” she said. “That’s what we think about it.”