

## Chula Vista doesn't have a skyline. This developer hopes to change that



A rendering of Bayview Point offers an aerial view of the development and San Diego Bay in the background. (Courtesy of MountainWest Real Estate)

By Tammy Murga

San Diego County's second-largest city does not have a skyline. That could change with a proposed, mixed-use development that would complement the forthcoming billion-dollar bayfront project, developers say.

MountainWest Real Estate affiliate Bayview Point, LLC is calling it Bayview Point.

The \$900 million development proposes to transform a 10-acre site between 707 F Street and 750 E Street into a "mixed-use mobility hub" where people can live, work and play within walking or bus-riding distance.

A proposal has been in the works for years and stalled because of the pandemic, but negotiations between Bayview, Chula Vista and San Diego Metropolitan Transit System are now underway.

The site is comprised of four acres of San Diego Metropolitan Transit System property on E Street and six acres of city-owned land on F Street. MTS has its E Street Transit Center that provides ancillary support for the UC San Diego Blue Line Trolley, 267 parking spaces and bus transfer terminals. The sole business in the area is the Cool Down Coffee shop. For more than 20 years, Chula Vista has leased its site to organizations for construction storage equipment, sand and gravel operations and other distribution services. Until 1999, the city had its Public Works Corporation Yard there. Together, the parcels make up one full city block.

Bayview Point would occupy the E Street side with a four-story medical center, retail and more than 260 affordable housing units. The F Street area would include two luxury residential towers of up to 22 stories and about 500 units, collectively. There would also be a fitness center and spa. A 24-story, five-star hotel with about 400 rooms and condos, a restaurant, a roof deck and meeting spaces are also proposed on this side.

Just west of the site and over Interstate 5 is where the 22-story, 1,600-room Gaylord Resort and Convention Center is being built. Together, these projects would rise higher than any other building in Chula Vista, followed by the 16-story Community Congregational Tower on Third Avenue and F Street.

"Between Gaylord and ourselves, for the first time, people living in downtown San Diego are going to be able to look to the south and see Chula Vista's skyline," said Kevin O'Neill with MountainWest.

An essential feature of the project is its proximity to public transit, which caters to Chula Vista's Urban Core Specific Plan of bringing "more housing, additional shopping opportunities, greater emphasis on walking instead of driving, and new revenue sources."

In front of the project's hotel and affordable housing units is the E Street train station, which runs along the I-5.

"Putting the Bayview project next to the trolley station will give people who live there easy access to be able to go to their job or go to a Padres game, Third Avenue or go to the Gaylord, as well as people who can get to the medical center," said Mayor John McCann.

For developers, Bayview meets the criteria of increasing ridership for MTS and revenue for Chula Vista via sales, property and transit occupancy tax monies.

MTS has not studied if a rise in ridership is guaranteed, as negotiations are still underway, but with the amount of housing, office and retail proposed, that is expected, according to the agency.

"MTS would generally expect these developments to increase ridership at the E Street Transit Center," said spokesperson Mark Olson. "The project will also act as a gateway to the upcoming Bayfront Convention Center project, which MTS hopes will encourage transit connections."

Research has shown that "well-designed, concentrated, mixed-use development around transit

nodes can boost patronage as much as five to six times higher than comparable development away from transit," a 2004 Transportation Research Board study found.

The transit center, with three bus routes, is already an active location in MTS' network. E Street sees about 6,000 transit boardings on an average weekday, Olson said.

There is a study between Chula Vista and the San Diego Association of Governments, the region's planning agency, to analyze alternatives for grade separating the MTS light rail train from the roadway crossings at E street and H Street, which could turn into a challenge for a project like Bayview Point.

Olson said the benefit is that a separation would "allow street traffic and Trolley traffic to flow independently from one another" and improve traffic flow around E Street.

"The initial challenges associated with the grade separation is funding; the second and larger challenge will be to keep all traffic — light rail, heavy rail, buses, bikes and personal vehicles — running while the grade separation is being constructed," he added.

Developers will also have to meet with Cool Down Coffee owners. Co-owner Alex Welti said his shop is a bustling café that has served many residents and tourists, especially with its proximity to the border, over the past eight years as the sole business in a busy transit center. A building for retail is planned for where the café currently stands. O'Neil said that "(a)s to their setting up in the new building," it would depend on what they could agree on but the project remains in its negotiations phase.

MTS can only lease their property, so the parties are working to arrive at an acceptable lease. As for the city, the developer is looking to buy the Chula Vista-owned site, said O'Neill. Once disposition and development agreements between the agencies have been drafted, the City Council and MTS board will consider approval.

Negotiations come after Chula Vista solicited development teams in 2019 that would transform the 10-acre area. The city favored a project that would prioritize job creation and long-term revenue, while MTS prioritized affordable housing, which Bayview is proposing on F and E streets.

After pandemic-related delays, two developer teams — Affirmed Housing and Bayview Point — were interviewed in June 2022. Affirmed Housing had proposed 570 residential units, of which more than 340 would be affordable housing. Their proposal did not include a hotel or retail. Bayview Point's development team includes Chelsea Investment Corporation, Tucker Sadler Architects, The Concord Group, Kimley-Horn, Wimmer Yamada and Caughey and Andrea Trapp.

Once approved, O'Neill said he envisions the project breaking ground in late 2024 with the affordable housing component.