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Cal Poly project could be Grover Beach blueprint

By Josh Petray/Staff Writer

Replacing blight with 100,000 square feet of mixed-use development is one thing Cal Poly students envisioned when developing plans for a project along West Grand Avenue in Grover Beach.

A dozen students from Cal Poly's Orfalea College of Business and the College of Architecture and Environmental Design's three departments devised a \$28.6-million, three-story, mixed-use, mixed-income housing project that may be used as a template for future development.

"To hammer out the details of a housing proposal is a really great experience overall," said D. Gregg Doyle, assistant professor in the department of city and regional planning and the student's coach on the project.

Dubbed Ventana Del Mar, the project was the second-place finisher in the 2006 Bank of America Low-Income Housing Challenge, with UC Berkeley on top and Stanford taking third place in the regional competition, according to university officials.

Results initially showed a tie for first between Cal Poly and UC Berkeley, with the tie-breaker going to Berkeley.

"It's difficult for us to compete sometimes because we generally don't have urban sites," Doyle said. "Universities in urban areas have complex urban sites."

The project, meanwhile, has sparked the interest of city officials.

"Ventana Del Mar is being seriously considered as a long-term viable option for that part of the Grand Avenue corridor," said George Hansen, Grover Beach community development director.

The proposed project would replace a blighted commercial space with 100,000 square feet of residential and commercial space, open space and an opportunity to create affordable housing.

The parcels used for the hypothetical project include 92,430 square feet occupied by the Grand Avenue Mobile Home Park at 1168 W. Grand Ave. and a 19,760-square-foot commercial site occupied by an all-terrain-vehicle rental and repair shop at 1206 W. Grand Avenue.

The 12-member project team partnered with the Housing Authority of the city of San Luis Obispo, Doyle said. A nonprofit organization would then be responsible for developing the project for the authority, he said.

The community may benefit from the student project, too.

"I think it's basically like a free, large consulting firm coming into your town and helping figure out all of the details of what could happen," said Doyle. "It's even more of benefit, I think, for the nonprofit, for the development partner - they don't have that many resources to flush out what could happen on the site."

"This was a way for us to step in and do some predevelopment work on a site that we feel is very affordable for families."

The project complies with the city's General Plan, zoning and community visioning of a more vibrant West Grand Avenue, according to the project report.

The project would consist of 91 units, including 80 affordable units and 10 more units earmarked for market-rate sale. The 10 units would be compact and affordable by design, according to Doyle.

He said the students took into account numerous factors, including preserving the affordable housing stock now provided by the mobile home park.

"It's basically at risk," Doyle said of the current project site. "There is a chance that a private developer would come in there and build a bunch of nonaffordable housing. So it's a way to make sure a site that has affordable housing now has affordable housing in the future."

Josh Petray can be reached at 489-4206, Ext. 5015, or jpetray@santamariatimes.com.

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