

Habitat for Humanity to purchase church property for new development

By Jack Rubinger
The Southwest Portland Post

Habitat for Humanity is planning to purchase the United Methodist Church property at 2401 SW Taylors Ferry Road to build homes for families on 12 individual lots.

The organization is still in final negotiations with the Oregon Idaho Conference of the United Methodist Church to purchase the site, so project details are limited.

The church decided to close its doors this year. According to church leaders, the church population was small and the building was in need of significant improvements to stay open.

It was only after their decision to close the church that they reached out to Habitat as a possible purchaser of the property so that it could be used for a purpose that advanced the ministry of the church.

"We're always on the lookout for land that is affordable that can be developed into affordable homes for hardworking families in need of an affordable place to live," said Melinda Musser, director of communications for Habitat for Humanity.

"We specifically look for sites where services are accessible, like public transportation, access to healthy food and good schools.

"With the increases in land values in recent years, this has become extremely



Habitat for Humanity plans to purchase property from the United Methodist Church in Southwest for a new housing development. (Photo courtesy of Habitat for Humanity)



The United Methodist Church building at Southwest 24th and Taylors Ferry Road is not being used due to deterioration. (Post photo by Don Snedecor)

challenging and we have come to rely on the generosity of others to sell us properties at a discount so that we can pass the savings along to families that cannot afford the current home values."

According to Musser, there is a huge need for affordable homeownership opportunities throughout Portland.

Many low and moderate income households are no longer able to buy their first home, because of the huge disparity between average income and average home prices.

Also, people are getting pushed further and further out of the city due to housing prices, which is causing longer commutes and increased traffic.

"We all know that housing is key to solving many of the problems our working poor families face," said Judith McGee of McGee Wealth Management. "Costs of living have outpaced people's resources.

"At my company, our employees have donated time working on Habitat for Humanity projects," said McGee.

"They are among the most rewarding team projects we've done. Portland needs to find housing solutions that work and look at alternatives that may be non-traditional. We can do better."

Once the appropriate permits to build have been secured and approved, it typically takes about one year for Habitat for Humanity to build and sell homes.

But it takes about 1-2 years to get site plans developed and through city permitting processes. So far, the organization hasn't run into any roadblocks.

Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East will be the developer/general contractor on this project.

Habitat has professional construction project managers and superintendents that lead the construction with a balance

of subcontracting work, like electrical and plumbing, and leading volunteers and future homeowners in doing things like framing and finish work.

Habitat goes through a careful selection process for all of the homes they build, and selects the families prior to starting to build the homes.

Each family puts in 500 hours of sweat equity helping to build their home and the homes around it alongside volunteers, and then buys the home from Habitat with an affordable mortgage.

Habitat qualifies the family for a mortgage just like a bank would qualify someone for a home loan, to ensure that they have a steady income and are likely to be successful homeowners.

"Habitat homes are built to last," said Musser. "We know that the families that buy our homes tend to stay put. Most of the first homes we built in Northeast Portland 25 to 30 years ago are still owned and lived in by the same families."

According to Musser, all Habitat homes have some private yard space, but it varies significantly from project to project. "In some cases we concentrate the houses together to create a shared common green space for a play area or garden. The site in Southwest Portland has a lower density zoning than some of our others which will result in larger yards."

Habitat for Humanity has been building homes in the Portland area for 35 years. While this initially started with building single family homes on individual lots, for the past 15 years most of Habitat's work has been in building communities of 10-45 homes.

This has included building communities of detached single family homes, like the 21 homes currently under construction in the Cully neighborhood.



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A view of the United Methodist Church property facing south. Habitat for Humanity is planning to build a cluster of affordable homes here. (Post photo by Don Snedecor)