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AMSTERDAM

Amsterdam moves with Veteran's Time to Thrive on properties

Ashley Onyon
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A rendering of the veteran housing project proposed on East Main Street by Veteran's Time to Thrive from the nonprofit's application to the Amsterdam Planning Commission.

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AMSTERDAM — A \$5,000 purchase option and development agreement with Veteran's Time to Thrive for previously cleared lots on East Main Street in Amsterdam has been authorized by the city.

The nonprofit plans to build a quality, affordable housing complex serving veterans and their families in a supportive environment on the vacant lots at 208-210 and 212 E. Main St.

It's a change to the original plans to build the project on Forbes Street immediately behind the city-owned lots on land previously bought by David and Tanya Mendez, who lead Veteran's Time to Thrive.

"The concept stays the same. It's just going to be better," David Mendez said Wednesday.

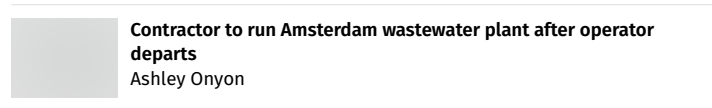
The option agreement authorized by the Common Council on Tuesday requires Veteran's Time to Thrive to secure all needed approvals and funding for the proposed building project in order to exercise the option to buy the land on East Main Street from the city. The option expires on Jan. 1, 2026.

Mayor Michael Cinquanti said the \$5,000 purchase price takes into account the land's value and the nonprofit's plan for the sites.

"We looked at the assessed value, we looked at the market value and we looked at what the project is proposing and what the benefit of the project would be to our community and military veterans and arrived at that number with all of those considerations in mind," Cinquanti said.

Furthermore, the mayor said David and Tanya Mendez have paid their taxes and kept their existing properties on Forbes Street behind the site well maintained over the years.

The city previously eliminated blight from the highly visible sites when the former Carmel's Diner and DiCaprio's Diner and a home on the lot behind them were demolished in 2022. Cinquanti noted the city has not been approached with any other proposals for the land.



"Our goal was to find a buyer with a plan," Cinquanti said. "We didn't want to just sell the vacant lots to someone who wanted to park cars on them or hold onto them speculatively."

Veteran's Time to Thrive had been planning for the last several years to build the unique housing project serving veterans and their families on Forbes Street.

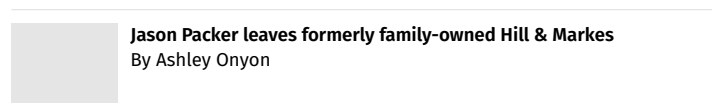
Two weeks ago, David Mendez hinted at a change to the building plans that he wasn't able to share yet when he bought another property at 88 Forbes St. from the city for \$2,001.

He had long eyed the properties on East Main Street for a possible second phase, but discussions with the city presented the opportunity to potentially flip those plans and expand the project on the larger site.

"I'm more excited now. With this being on East Main Street, it's a better building, it's more accessible and we can make this a pilot program," David Mendez said. "The city has been with me 110% the whole time. They've been extremely helpful."

Revised plans now call for the construction of a 12-unit apartment building on East Main Street with a communal kitchen and shared spaces on the ground floor, including a business incubator and offices for on-site counseling and support services.

The project specifically for veterans and their families would mimic housing on a military base, in order to provide a supportive living environment military families are accustomed to. It would also provide opportunities for veterans living off-site to be part of an understanding local community and to get help when they need it.



David Mendez, a now retired U.S. Navy commander, came up with the concept to address the common struggles he's observed among service members and their families during deployment and after their return home.

"Veterans work together, of course, on the battlefield, but families work together when those veterans go to the battlefield, they form communities. And what they're trying to do is reenact that community in an apartment building on the East End of our city. And if it's successful, I think it'll be a model that will be used throughout the country," Cinquanti said.

The proposed incubator space would provide opportunities for veterans and their families to start their own businesses. This commercial area would be able to be expanded at the East Main Street site, which Mendez said should help ensure the viability of the project and assist upcoming funding applications.

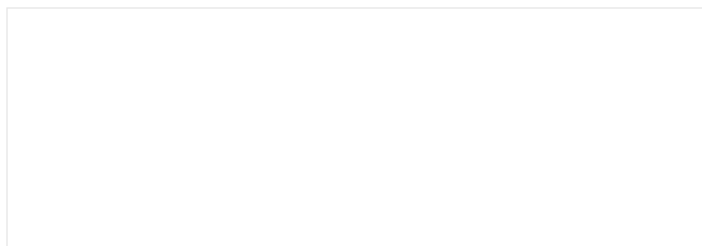
The option agreement authorized by the city provides the nonprofit site control to begin seeking local approvals and then funding. The building plans will be reviewed by the Planning Commission at 6 p.m. on Wednesday.

Should the project be constructed and prove successful, David Mendez said smaller veteran housing structures could be built in phases on Forbes Street with the East Main Street building serving as a communal hub.

"Once we get this building built and good to go, I can start building on the other properties we own," David Mendez said.



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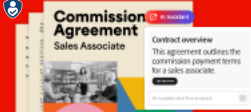
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Ashley Onyon

Reach Ashley Onyon at aonyon@dailygazette.net or @AshleyOnyon on X.

Ashley Onyon


Reporter

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