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Ashland community group plans warm and welcoming neighborhood

“Can you come next Tuesday for a cup of tea? Would you like to join us for a walk through our wetlands? There's a great kletzmer group coming to the Havurah on Monday. Is there anything I can pick up for you at Costco?”

Tim and Fran Orrok envision an Ashland neighborhood that adds everyday neighborliness to the many joys of Ashland life. Of course Ashland already has great neighborhoods but, for the Orroks and other supporters of Aleph Springs, neighborhood relationships should be part of the residential design and construction process.

They have a point. In our highly mobile society, a warm and welcoming new neighborhood might need a bit of forethought and encouragement.

“Our vision is a caring, supportive neighborhood for people of all ages, able bodied or not, and a wide range of financial situations,” said Dr. Laura Robin, chair of the Aleph Springs working group, which is planning to finance and build 14 homes [in Ashland, Oregon].

“To the best of our knowledge, we are initiating a unique approach to Jewish community living in the United States, Dr. Robin continued.

Like families, neighborhoods provide informal, everyday social connections that are vital to the development of the young, the security of elders and the happiness of everyone. But building houses is not the same as creating a successful neighborhood. The dozen or so Aleph Springs backers started with the goal of creating a vital neighborhood and are planning the project accordingly. Back door walkways will connect homes and provide easy access to the Havurah. All residents will share a large common area, a community garden and a playground.

The new neighborhood will border Havurah Shir Hadash, a synagogue on North Mountain Avenue. Members of the working group see proximity to the Havurah as an important asset. The Havurah hosts a variety of non-denominational activities and services including a pre-school, film nights and concerts.

But backers of the project believe it is the concept of a vital community that will draw residents to Aleph Springs.

“Aleph Springs will be a place where people can come together, regardless of religion,” said Laurel Miller, a member of the group that purchased the property.

The idea of a neighborhood designed with community in mind is consistent with the outlook of Havurah Shir Hadash. The Havurah is affiliated with the Jewish Renewal movement, which emphasizes both reinvigorating the practices of

Judaism and learning from other cultures. Aleph Springs will “enlarge the spirit and family of the Havurah,” according to supporter Sharon Javna.

Aleph Springs will be open to anyone who seeks, as Javna described it, “that neighbor thing that you can’t get any other way than being next door.”

Led by Rabbi David Zaslow, the Havurah community voted overwhelmingly to support property line adjustments and access arrangements that will enable Aleph Springs will be built.

The Aleph Springs neighborhood will include eight new single-family homes, a six unit condominium building and an existing historic house. Prices will range from the mid \$200s to the upper \$400s. Each residence will be designed to be comfortable and accessible for people of all ages, including those with physical handicaps.

In addition to offering social benefits, Aleph Springs is designed to be friendly from an environmental viewpoint. A large area will be left open for a ‘village green.’ To take maximum advantage of the sun’s energy, living areas of the new homes will be oriented toward the south. (Southern exposures also offer stunning views of the nearby Siskiyous.) Solar panels can be installed on south-facing rooftops and an existing wetland will be enlarged to include a 2,000 square foot bioswale (an engineered wetland designed to collect and purify runoff from nearby paved areas).

One of Ashland's busy bike paths passes nearby and, for pedestrians, downtown and Railroad District shops and restaurants are just a few blocks away.

Aleph Springs backers are hoping to blaze a trail for the creation of small, supportive neighborhoods both locally and nationally.

"We see this project as being in harmony with the needs of the Havurah and the needs of the Ashland community," commented Devorah Zaslou, wife of Rabbi David Zaslou.

"This project will be the first of its kind and a model in Jewish Renewal," she added

Along with a recent co-housing project, Aleph Springs will also be one of the few such neighborhoods ever built in Ashland by a community group rather than by an individual developer.

Aleph Springs is currently accepting refundable deposits from people who are interested in joining the Aleph Springs neighborhood. The City of Ashland has approved the plan and is processing the first round of permits. Construction of streets and utilities is scheduled to begin this spring.

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