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New downtown-area townhomes get first approval

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New townhomes are planned at the north end of downtown along School Avenue between Fruitville Road and Main Street.

The project by Icon Residential would add 37 townhomes at the site of dilapidated former YMCA buildings.

Site plans for the project were approved unanimously by the city's planning board on Wednesday night, and the plans will be forwarded to the City Commission for its approval.

The project continues in the vein of the city's urban focus, with three-story, walk-up townhomes with pedestrian access right up to the sidewalks along the property, according to the plans. The homes will average about 2,100 square feet and those along Fruitville Road and Main Street could also include roof-top decks.

Plans also include the saving of a large palm tree, preserving seven live oaks and planting a dozen more trees than are on the site now, landscape architect Chris Anuszkiewicz said.

"It's not just urban infill, but we're also accomplishing tree preservation," said Brian Kiraly, planning manager for Icon Residential. "I think we have an award-winning project here."

Paired with proposed plans to build affordable housing across Fruitville Road to the north, the townhomes could help revitalize a portion of the city that sorely needs it, board members agreed.

"It just seems this project and the one just to the north are going to get a real increase in activity in that part of the city and this is going to be another great addition compared to what is there now," board member Vald Svekis said. "The sooner it can be done the better."

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