



jball@gracelandfruit.com
dengler@gracelandfruit.com
president@benziehabitat.org



www.gracelandfruit.com
www.benziehabitat.org



1123 Main Street, Frankfort, MI 49635

Graceland Fruit – Benzie Habitat FAQ

On September 21, 2022, Graceland Fruit and Benzie Habitat announced a partnership addressing the critical shortage of affordable housing in Benzie County. This FAQ has been created to help answer questions and address concerns about the partnership and proposed project.

What is the proposed project?

The proposed project is an affordable housing development in Gilmore Township. The proposed project plan shows room for 65 quarter-acre lots, with the first phase targeted at 23 homesites.

Where is the property for the housing development located?

The property is being donated by Graceland Fruit and is a 40-acre parcel located off Grace Road, adjacent to the Forrester Road processing facility.

The 40-acre parcel represents less than 1% of the total land mass of Gilmore Township. While the project could be transformational in terms of providing needed housing for our area, it will impact just a tiny fraction of Gilmore Township, allowing the township to retain its rural nature.

Is the property zoned for this type of development?

The property is currently zoned as rural preservation. Given the proposed location, the zoning will need to be amended to accommodate the new housing. Graceland Fruit and Benzie Habitat are collaborating on this and working together to initiate the zoning change process with the township.

Graceland Fruit and Benzie Habitat acknowledged that the parcel in question is not currently zoned for this type of development and that any such development would require permission from the township.

Have changes been made to the proposed project plan released by Graceland Fruit?

The proposed project plan is to install infrastructure for phase one (23 homesites) and build homes as demand warrants. The homes will be around 1,100 square feet and modeled after other homes built by Benzie Habitat in the county. This initial concept is subject to change as input is received from the county, township, and other stakeholders. Benzie Habitat would build out the balance of the property at a later date, depending on demand.

What is Graceland Fruit's role in the partnership?

Graceland Fruit is making available, as a donation, approximately 40 acres of land in Gilmore Township for an affordable housing project. Graceland Fruit is helping to support the project with capital and other resources and ensure the project is built responsibly. Graceland Fruit is also assisting in early development, contributing outside engineering and legal resources. This is not a for-profit endeavor for Graceland Fruit.

What is Benzie Habitat's role in the partnership?

It is contemplated that Benzie Habitat will be responsible for the family selection, mortgage arrangements, and home construction. These are activities normally involved with a Habitat for Humanity home. The arrangement of infrastructure financing, the infrastructure itself, and other early activities is contemplated to be on a shared basis.

What type of homes will be built?

The goal of Graceland Fruit and Benzie Habitat is to create a neighborhood to be proud of. The concept includes paved streets and plentiful green space, and parkland. Benzie Habitat constructs stick-built or modular homes.

Who will live in these homes?

Habitat for Humanity homeowners come from all walks of life and occupations (bank tellers, teachers, chefs, etc.). Benzie Habitat will use its established process for identifying, vetting, and approving all homeowners. Prospective Habitat for Humanity homeowners must complete a rigorous application and approval process, qualify for and obtain a mortgage, be employed and have established credit, and provide 200 hours of sweat equity into their future home.

I heard the land is contaminated. Is that true?

Up until the mid-2000s, Graceland Fruit maintained a lagoon for its wastewater behind its plant on Forrester Road and irrigated some of the farmland to the south of the plant with the wastewater. This was and still is a common practice in the food processing industry and was done with proper permits from the State of Michigan. Ultimately it was discovered that the wastewater (primarily water and sugar) was having an adverse impact on the groundwater in the area by raising the level of iron and other naturally occurring metals. In 2007, in cooperation with the State, Graceland Fruit constructed a multimillion-dollar wastewater treatment facility and discontinued the irrigation practice. Graceland Fruit provides water and/or water treatment to anyone in the area who is impacted and continues to monitor the groundwater to make sure that the problem eventually dissipates.

The site proposed for the housing development was never irrigated with wastewater and sits to the west of the area experiencing the highest levels of iron content. Graceland Fruit monitors the groundwater at the proposed site and has worked with a respected environmental consultant to situate the project so that it will not be impacted by any groundwater issues.

What is the current status of the project?

Graceland Fruit and Benzie Habitat are working with the township zoning administration and other local officials to determine how the development project might be moved forward. The established protocols will be followed, including a public hearing if required. There is no formal application to be considered at this point. We are hopeful to resolve the zoning issue in the near future and begin installing the necessary infrastructure for phase one in the summer of 2023.

How do I get more information?

You may email info@gracelandfruit.com or president@benziehabitat.org.