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The Valley Press

City moves forward with transit development plan

By: Alisha Semchuck



PALMDALE - Commercial and residential construction projects suit city plans for a proposed transit-oriented development area.

The project won't be completed anytime soon, according to city planners who had a scoping meeting Wednesday night in City Council chambers to provide

community residents with an overview of the project and inform them of the next stage in the process - preparation of an Environmental Impact Report.

Mayor Jim Ledford said the city is working toward developing a transportation infrastructure. Land use planning around the future transit station is a critical component of the project.

Palmdale continues to move forward with the planning efforts, Ledford said.

Money comes from "a Metro-funded grant that focuses on developing land use and transportation concepts (which) are consistent with transit-oriented development standards," said Mike Behen, the city's Transportation/Special Projects manager. The grant gives the city \$400,000 for the project.

Starla Barker, a project manager with Michael Baker International, the engineering firm contracted to prepare the EIR, described the project's framework, which she said establishes a vision to guide the development, including improvements around the transit hub, situated in areas frequented by the public.

The overall concept, according to Barker, is "high-intensity mixed use directly adjacent to the future station."

That includes offices, hotels, retail (outlets) and multi-family residential facilities, which builds the foundation for new transit-oriented neighborhoods.

"Avenue Q will act as a transit spine that links the station area to entertainment and residential areas," Barker said.

The existing neighborhood around R. Rex Parris High School would be preserved and enhanced, she added. Parks, landscaped streets and open spaces will link recreation areas and neighborhoods.

Key elements for streets and open space necessitate a pedestrian-friendly street design; a network of open space corridors; vibrant parks; and complete streets, which accommodate driving, walking, biking, transit, rail and light rail for people of all ages, whether they are able to walk or use a walker or wheelchair to move around.

Other key elements include shade trees or structures that offer relief from a beating sun, lighting at night and seating as well as water-efficient landscaping compatible with the environment, according to Barker.

Based on the current framework, Barker said, 1,321 residential units will be removed. In their place, 4,208 new residential units will be constructed.

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In addition, 1 million square feet of non-residential uses will be removed, replaced with the construction of 8.4 million square feet of non-residential uses, including retail, office, industrial and research space.

"We're not going out tomorrow to condemn properties or take homes," Behen said. "We're only developing plans for future land uses in the area of the proposed station, sometime around 2029."

The complete buildout has a tentative date of 2035, Barker said.

Regarding compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act, Barker said planners must disclose information about potentially significant environmental effects of a project.

In doing that, they also must identify ways to avoid or mitigate those impacts.

In order to accomplish that, the planners are attempting to encourage public participation in the planning process and also "foster interagency coordination in the review of projects," Barker said.

"We're in the beginning of the CEQA process," Barker said.

A notice of preparation went out with a period for public and agency input that began Jan. 23 and ends Feb. 21. A draft EIR will be ready for public review sometime this summer, followed by response to comments in the fall, according to Barker.

A final EIR is expected to be ready in winter.

The EIR will address a multitude of issues dealing with aesthetics; agriculture and forestry resources; biological resources; cultural resources; geology and soils; greenhouse gas emissions; hazards and hazardous materials; hydrology and water; land use and planning; mineral resources; and noise among other possible concerns.

Submit written comments to Ms. Carlene Saxton, senior planner, City of Palmdale, Department of Economic and Community Development, Planning Division, 38250 Sierra Highway, Palmdale, CA 93550.

Written comments can be emailed to Saxton at csaxton@cityofpalmdale.org.

For questions, call (661) 267-5200.

The public comment period closes at 6 p.m. Feb. 21.

"Planning for the future is at the forefront of the organization in the city of Palmdale," Behen said. "We are pursuing grants and funding opportunities to create a framework for a community abundant in jobs, recreation, housing and transportation."

To share your opinion on this article or any other article, write a letter to the editor and email it to editor@avpress.com or mail it to Letters to Editor, PO Box 4050, Palmdale, CA 93590-4050.

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