

San Leandro moves on transit-linked projects

February 8, 2010

By Blanca Torres

San Leandro is beginning to see its transit-oriented dreams come true.

The city mostly known for warehouses and industrial sites has several developments including office, residential and commercial in the works for its downtown area near the BART station.

“This is just furthering smart growth,” said Cynthia Battenberg, business development manager for the city. “We have retained our industrial sites and zoning, but we do need to create additional residential development to meet state requirements.”

San Leandro implemented a transit-oriented development strategy for its downtown in 2007 that calls for more than 2,400 new residential units, 92,000 square feet of retail and 718,200 square feet of office.

Various projects are now materializing. This month, some 600 Regional Center of the East Bay workers will flood into an 85,000-square-foot building recently completed as part of Creekside Plaza, a three-building office complex.

The Regional Center is moving its headquarters to San Leandro from Oakland.

In the next few months, Bridge Housing will break ground on The

Alameda, a \$40 million, 100-unit affordable apartment complex that will eventually neighbor Cornerstone, a 200-unit market-rate project planned by Westlake Development Partners.

This year, BART expects to begin work on a 329-space parking garage to free up a surface parking lot for development.

The city has also pumped \$5 million into making downtown more pedestrian friendly by improving streets, landscaping, areas for outdoor dining and a new plaza.

A marketing and branding campaign is promoting a new downtown San Leandro logo. The city hired Main Street Properties, a retail development advisory firm, to help existing merchants and help attract new retailers.

David Irmer, a lead developer of Creekside Plaza, recently entered an exclusive negotiating agreement to develop two more downtown parcels. One is a former 1.7-acre Albertsons site at East 14th Street and the other is a 2.5-acre parcel called the Town Hall Square at Davis and 14th streets.

Both sites will likely end up as some form of mixed-use, Irmer said. He has hired MCG Architects for the design.

Irmer, a longtime Bay Area developer, began developing Creekside Plaza more than a decade ago and sees San Leandro as a area prime for more office and retail development. It has access to BART as well as Interstate 880 and is eight minutes from the Oakland Airport.

“Transportation, now and in the future, will determine where the significant office users are going to locate,” Irmer said. “To build Class A office space, to accommodate some of those users, is my headache now. How many would relocate to San Leandro if they had Class A buildings?”

Sunny Tong, managing director with Westlake Development Partners in San Mateo, said construction will likely start on the Cornerstone project in 2012.

The firm has owned the vacant, 5.3-acre site for more than 20 years and was waiting for the right opportunity to build a project. The city’s transit-oriented strategy gave Westlake the nudge it needed to put a plan on paper.

“Just owning land doesn’t mean you can justify building any vertical improvement,” Tong said. “San Leandro has a very proactive stance on how they want to see the city evolve. They helped define a path for the developers.”