

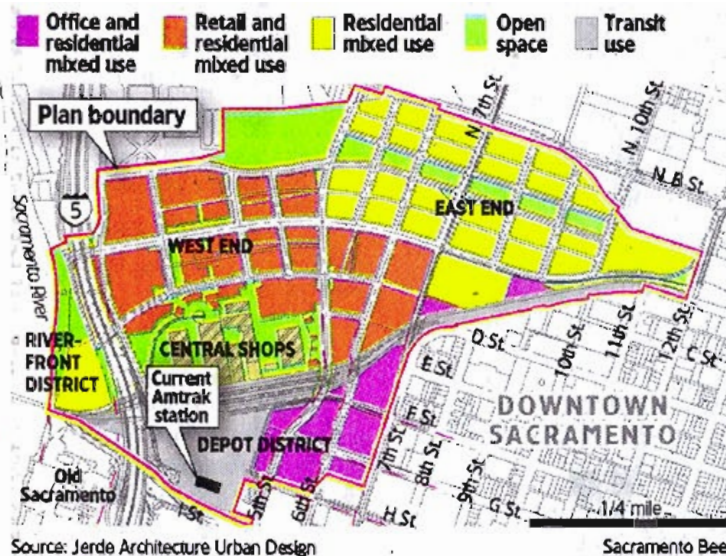
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Plan for the downtown railyard gets refined

Developer Thomas Enterprises has revised its plan for the downtown railyard in response to input from the city of Sacramento and the community. Curving streets have been straightened out into a grid that lines up better with the existing downtown. A planned canal in one of the neighborhoods has been turned into a series of parks. The city is seeking public input on the plan, which also includes a major new arts facility for the region.



Railyard proposal takes new shapes

Arena and canal are out as developer adds 1-acre parks and 2,000 housing units.

By Mary Lynne Vellinga
BEE STAFF WRITER

The developer of the downtown railyard this week unveiled a new version of its plan for the 240-acre site — one that better connects the proposed development to the city's existing streets, and replaces a planned canal with a string of 1-acre parks.

Curving boulevards and long blocks have

given way to a grid that mirrors Sacramento. City officials and community activists say the shorter blocks would be more hospitable to pedestrians.

"Before, it was much more of a suburban type subdivision with wide boulevards and cul-de-sacs," said Assistant City Manager Marty Hanneman.

The canal idea was scrapped because of concern about people falling in, and also the potential difficulty of keeping the water clean, he said.

Another 2,000 housing units were added to the plan — bringing the total to 12,000.

A new arena for the Kings has been deleted

— at least for now — because voters last November rejected the idea of paying for one. The "sports and entertainment zone" contained in the last version of the plan has been turned into a "West End" district of stores, housing and a hotel.

One thing hasn't changed, however. A giant Bass Pro fishing emporium will be one of the first things built in the converted railyard. It's planned for the northwestern edge of the site closest to Interstate 5.

The evolving vision for the railyard now includes a major performing arts complex and conservatory — dubbed the California Acad-

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emy of the Arts. Developer Thomas Enterprises is working with major arts groups in town, along with California State University, Sacramento, and the University of California, Davis.

"We want to attract students from all over. We want to become the West Coast Juilliard (School)," said Richard Rich, development director for Thomas Enterprises, the Georgia-based developer that in December bought the property from Union Pacific.

Rich also is working with representatives of the city Asian American community to create a memorial — they are now pushing for a museum — that would document the history of Yee Fou (or Second City), the Chinese neighborhood that once bustled just south of the railyard. It also could recall the contributions of Chinese workers to building the transcontinental railroad.

The city of Sacramento plans to solicit public comment on the new plan — which will guide development in the railyard over the next 20 years — at a workshop

Thursday, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the Amtrak depot on I Street.

"We want as many people as possible to come and give us their feedback," Hanneman said.

The city took title to the depot at the same time that Thomas Enterprises bought the rest of the railyard, ending nearly 150 years of railroad ownership. The city plans to build a new transit center in the railyard, just south of the historic shops.

City leaders have adopted an aggressive timeline for getting the railroad development on track toward construction. The schedule calls for an environmental impact report to be issued by August, and for a final City Council vote on the project by fall.

"In the next six months, we're going to be moving at warp speed," Hanneman said.

Major financial hurdles remain before construction can begin, however.

Thomas Enterprises and the city are working on a financing plan they can use to cobble together the \$530 million for

streets, sewers, power lines and other infrastructure that will be needed in the railyard as it gradually builds out to become a major extension of downtown.

Another \$300 million — about a third of which already has been identified — is needed for the city to build its planned multi-use transit center for trains, light rail and buses. Part of that plan is to move the historic depot about a block to the north and make it part of the new complex.

Finally, the developer also will be looking for funds to help restore the historic brick railroad shops into a public market, restaurants and entertainment venues.

The state, meanwhile, is working on its own plan to transform some of the buildings as an extension of the California State Railroad Museum that would showcase railroad technology.

City leaders and executives of Thomas Enterprises are busy meeting with politicians in the Capitol — getting in line for money from state bonds approved last fall to help transit-oriented development.

"We're getting a lot of attention at the

state level," said Thomas Enterprises Vice President Suheil Totah.

These days, as they begin the daunting task of pushing their vision toward reality, Totah and Rich are spending much of their time giving tours of the railyard, which was long shuttered and off-limits to the public.

Marj Dickinson, assistant vice chancellor of UC Davis, took a tour on Wednesday. She was charmed by the old shop buildings, a warren of 19th-century brick structures lined with arched windows and separated by narrow alleys.

"I kept wandering around looking at those buildings and saying, 'Who would ever build industrial buildings with all those wonderful arches now. They're beautiful. Aesthetically you can imagine all sorts of exciting space that just brings people in.'"

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 The Bee's Mary Lynne Vellinga can be reached at (916) 321-1094 or mlvel-linga@sacbee.com.