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Chugging Forward on Railyards Project Redevelopment Plans Presented to the Community



Residents take in an informative display at a meeting on railyard redevelopment.

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Invite them and they will come—thus was the case when the city of Sacramento recently invited the community to attend a public meeting regarding the development of downtown Sacramento's historic railyards.

With much anticipation about the future of the former 240-acre Southern Pacific Railroad/Union Pacific Railroad property, which Thomas Enterprises purchased last December, more than 200 people overflowed the 100-seat Model Room and part of the adjacent lobby of the historic Southern Pacific depot on the evening of June 7.

The purpose of the meeting was to present Thomas Enterprises' proposal for see RAILYARDS page 31

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the property and to gather public opinion regarding the future of this property, which is recognized as the region's largest urban landfill site.

The event, which included speeches by Mayor Heather Fargo, Councilmember Ray Tretheway, Thomas Enterprises Vice President Suheil Totah and Thomas Enterprises Development Director Richard Rich, featured an overview of the proposed project's details, which includes a 32-acre intermodal facility.

"The centerpiece of the project is the intermodal facility," Totah said. "It's a mixed-use project that brings jobs and housing together downtown, so people can walk from where they live to their jobs without the need to get in a car and be on the freeway."

One of the major announcements of the evening was made by Rich, who told attendees of the event that the project's emphasis on residential housing had drastically expanded from its initial plan of including about 3,000 houses.

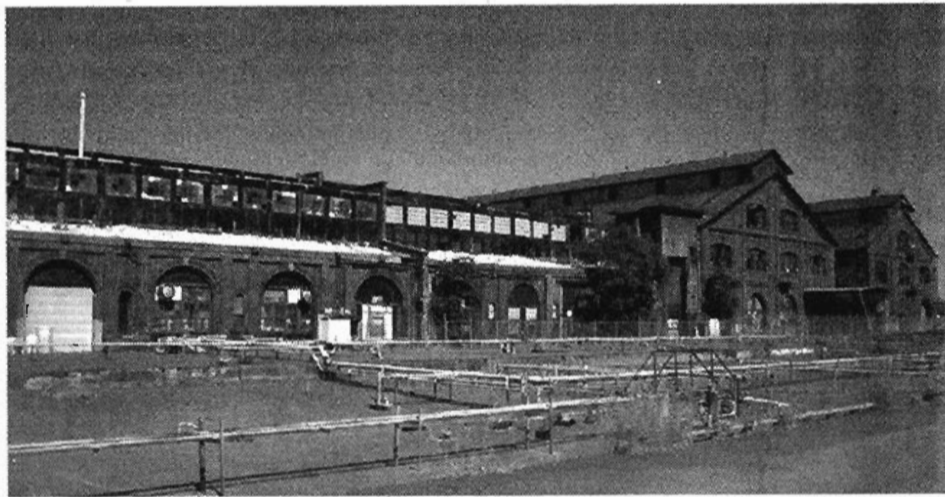
Although the project is not projected to be presented to the council until sometime in the fall, preliminary efforts for the project, including toxic dirt removal, are already well underway.

Historically, the area has been well documented for its abundance of toxic soil. Most notable among the details of the site's toxic soil history is the former garbage and sewer dumping water basin, China Slough, which encompassed the city blocks between Front and 6th streets and G and I streets until it was completely filled in by 1910.

The current toxic cleanup project is being performed on the northwest corner of the property, near Interstate 5 and Richards Boulevard.

And with Thomas Enterprises' plan to remove about 300,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil, it can be understood why an early cleanup start would be beneficial toward a timelier overall project completion.

"We've started an aggressive campaign to finish (the removal of the contaminated



One of the railyards' seven historic buildings. (Sacramento Union Photo/Lance Armstrong)

Two of the railyards' seven historic buildings would be preserved and protected as "national treasures."

"We'll have a minimum, under the current plan, of 10,000 houses and up to 12,000," Rich said. "That just gives us more of a chance to put in affordable housing, more people downtown, being able to, in a sense, energize Downtown Plaza, K Street, typically Old Sacramento."

Other components of this project are: 2,337,200 square feet of office space, 1,384,800 square feet of retail, 491,000 square feet of mixed-use space, 41.16 acres of open space, a 1,100-room hotel, and 485,390 feet of historic/cultural space.

Among the more definitive plans for the project are a relocation of the depot and its tracks about 300 feet north, an open air market for farmers' markets and other gatherings, a football field-sized plaza, restaurants, nightclubs, and a performing arts center, which would offer about 1,000 performances per year.

The project is proposed in several phases with the first phase beginning after the August release of an Environmental Impact Report, followed by an approval of the project by the city council.

Thus far, Thomas Enterprises proposed plan has been well received.

Commenting on Thomas Enterprises' efforts to bring a new look to the railyards, Tretheway said, "These folks want to live in the future. They want to build the best possible neighborhood, retail, parks, riverfront and be part of the downtown city of Sacramento."

soil)," Rich said. "It's not really rocket science. If you have contaminated soil, you dig it up and move it away and then you put clean soil back in there."

Rich added that last month 50,000 yards of contaminated soil was removed from the site.

Other topics of discussion about the project included the proposed plans for the area's streets, a series of parks throughout the site and brief mentions of decisions to eliminate underground parking and a water canal.

Street plans for this proposed project include a continuance of the grid pattern of downtown Sacramento streets and "pedestrian-friendly" streets with smaller lanes, wider sidewalks and short crossing distances at intersections.

In order to assist traffic flow to the central city, one-way streets have also been proposed for 5th and 7th streets.

Discussion regarding a companion to Old Sacramento's California State Railroad Museum through the addition of a railroad technology museum at the railyards site drew much public interest at the meeting.

Two of the railyards' seven historic buildings, which would be preserved and protected as "national treasures," are proposed to be used for the museum.

To date, \$13 million has been made available through California State Parks for the purpose of structurally stabilizing and rehabilitating the railyards' 1860s cen-

tral shop buildings, the erecting shop and the boiler shop.

Although not specifically discussed within the meeting, another museum effort, the Yee Fow Museum, is desired by a group in the community, who is striving to bring this Chinese cultural and educational center to the railyards.

The significance of having this museum at this site is well stated through the local organization, Friends of the Yee Fow Museum's mission statement, which reads: "The mission of the Friends of the Yee Fow Museum is to advocate the need for a museum in the railyards of Sacramento that commemorates our forefathers of the Asian Pacific Islanders, the Chinese pioneers of Yee Fow."

Furthermore, the presence of such a museum in the railyards is of historical significance, when considering that the Central Pacific Railroad was mostly built by Chinese, many of who made their home in Yee Fow - Sacramento's original Chinatown - along the south side of China Slough in the approximate location of the historic Southern Pacific depot.

town, we would like to see it downtown and we would support it if it were downtown. But that is part of the discussions between the NBA and the Maloofs and the city, but we're ready to help, if we can."

With a more personalized, non-group approach, the evening ended the same way in which it began, with city officials and representatives of Thomas Enterprises making themselves available to speak face-to-face with attendees of the event in an informal manner.

For those who either did not get a chance or chose not to ask questions to these representatives or had additional unanswered questions, displays around the room provided plenty of space for writing down these questions, which would later be made available to Thomas Enterprises and the city.

Additionally, Fargo encouraged members of the community to share their opinions and concerns about the proposed railyards project with the city.

"This is a project, which is incredibly important to the city of Sacramento, it's actually incredibly important to the region,

"If a deal comes together, they will still be able to put in an arena."

"Having a world class Chinese center at this site would enhance Sacramento tremendously," said Sam Ong, one of the individuals working to have the museum built at this site.

Although the topic of including a new entertainment complex within the railyards site, which would replace Natomas' aging Arco Arena, has become a very stagnant issue, Rich said that the prospect of such a venue remains a possibility.

"If a deal comes together, they will still be able to put in an arena," Rich said. "We think the arena is a great project for down-

and it is such an opportunity for us," Fargo said. "We want to make sure that we don't make any big mistakes at the start and that's part of your job that we don't."

And with a smile on her face, the mayor expressed the excitement that she feels regarding this major city project.

"The city of Sacramento is so fortunate to have this kind of opportunity right next to our downtown," Fargo said. "Our downtown is doing great, making a lot of progress, but this is really going to add to the momentum of what's going on in the city and add to the excitement of Sacramento."