

Range of Developments in South County May Urge Further Changes

By DIANA SAMUELS

With new development in South County ranging from San Diego's first toll road, to a bayfront overhaul and high-rise condominiums, these projects exemplify the changes to the area and carry the potential to spur even more growth.

SOUTH BAY EXPRESSWAY

A 10-mile toll road extension to State Route 125, dubbed the "South Bay Expressway," most likely will open around March or April 2007, according to Greg Hulsizer, CEO of California Transportation Ventures, which is developing the road in a joint partnership with Caltrans.

The toll road will connect State Route 905 in Otay Mesa to State Route 54 in Spring Valley, and is currently in the midst of construction.

"It's pretty difficult to drive anywhere around Chula Vista or Bonita and not see our construction going on," Hulsizer said.

Developers are also determining toll prices, which should be announced sometime in the second half of the year, he said. The creation of the expressway will go hand-in-hand with the development planned for the region, Hulsizer said, and will make it easier for people from outside South County to travel to some of the new buildings in the area.

"Some people have called the South Bay Expressway the economic engine for that development," Hulsizer said.

CHULA VISTA BAYFRONT

Another ongoing plan in South County would renovate more than 200 acres of Chula Vista's bayfront, with features including parks and a large hotel and conference center.

The Port of San Diego and the city of Chula Vista are currently in negotiations with Gaylord Entertainment over the development of a 1,500-room resort and convention center.

Irene McCormack, director of communications for the Port of San Diego, said Gaylord's involvement could "jumpstart" the project and help it build out within 10 to 15 years, instead of the 25 to 30 years originally expected.

"With the advent of Gaylord's interest, if we're successful in negotiations ... they tend to be a real catalyst for change happening much more quickly," said Laurie Madigan, Chula Vista assistant city manager.

Project organizers are also finalizing the Environmental Impact Report, which judges a potential development's effects on the environment and recommends ways to reduce those effects. The EIR should be available for public review and comment next month, McCormack said.

The bayfront project has the potential to change the community by encouraging new investment, especially in the older downtown area, Madigan said. In addition, it would add 20 acres of new parkland, she said, making up for a previous lack of parks in that part of the city.

"A site along the bay like this would give the community a place to gather," McCormack said.

NATIONAL CITY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

National City is another South County area at an "opportune time and location" for development, said Joshua Knoefler, president of Knoefler Enterprises.

Over the last few years, in addition to improvements to civic buildings and projects such as the Education Village that houses Southwestern College, National City is seeing a boom in residential developments.

Knoefler said he is waiting for city approvals to come through before breaking ground on Green Village, a project that would add 1,100 condominium units as well as retail and office space. The environmentally friendly project is Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified.

Another major residential project currently under way is Constellation Property Group's Revolution development along National City Boulevard. The three-stage project will total around 360 units, including a 22-story tower that will be the highest residential building in South County, said Anthony Napoli, director of project sales for Constellation Property Group.

Constellation hopes to start clearing ground for their first building near the end of July, will start on the second building two to three months later and will begin construction on the tower in early 2007, Napoli said.

Revolution and Green Village are part of a larger development boom in National City. Raymond Pe, project manager for National City Community Development Commission, told The Daily Transcript in May that there were around 20 major residential projects in the works in National City, potentially creating almost 4,800 residential units.

Napoli said part of the reason behind the sudden development is the increase in people trying to avoid rising gas prices and long commutes downtown.

“Why not live just walking distance from a trolley stop?” he asked.

As recently as June 14, the City Council of National City approved a KMA Architecture and Engineering project consisting of a 187-unit townhome and tower development.

“The city is poised for a really incredible growth,” Napoli said. “The city is just going to be on the fast track.”