

MacArthur BART transit village gets green light



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Steve Ginsberg

After 15 years of planning, construction could start on a transit village at the MacArthur BART station late next year. A new plaza for BART patrons and a parking garage will kick off the long-anticipated project that will partially transform the neighborhood at MacArthur Boulevard and Telegraph Avenue.

MacArthur Transit Community Partners LLC plans to start construction of Phase I’s centerpiece, a 400 space parking garage, in late 2009. The garage will free up acreage to build future condominiums and retail on land now used for parking. Phase I also includes the building of two new streets and infrastructure improvements to the current BART station. It will take about 12 months to complete the garage and infrastructure improvements — the cost is around \$35 million.

The \$340 million project will create 624 multi-family condominium units in later phases along with 42,500 square feet of retail.

Much progress was made last summer when the city certified MacArthur Transit’s environmental impact report and the state of California granted the project \$34.3 million from Proposition 1C funds, which created bonds that target transit-oriented development. Oakland’s redevelopment agency had previously committed \$32.5 million.

The development team comprises San Francisco’s Bridge Urban Infill Land Development — a nonprofit — and Oakland’s McGrath Properties, a for-profit developer.

“Our focus now is on the first phase. While we have most initial commitments lined up for the second phase (of condos and retail), that phase is pretty far out, so we don’t anticipate closing on the residential financing until 2011 and 2012,” said Joe McCarthy, a project manager for Bridge Housing.

Bridge will manage the 108 affordable housing units there while McGrath will handle the market-rate component. Bridge has done transit-oriented development projects at the West Oakland station while this is McGrath’s first of this type.

Residential construction will likely not start until 2011 or 2012. It will be at least four to five years before the project’s first residents move in. The final phase is expected to be completed by 2018.

The project has gone through various design gestations and was originally conceived as a pair of twin condo towers rising 23 stories above the heavily used (6,500 riders daily) station. Critics didn’t like the scale and the project now will be series of four buildings, with the tallest building at six stories.

Another major issue was replacement parking. The developers had hoped to reduce the current 600-spot parking lot to 300 spots. BART patrons complained and now the plan will provide 510 spaces. The developers are acquiring two motels along Telegraph Avenue for more acreage to allow for the additional parking. City redevelopment funds will contribute for the land acquisitions that are currently being negotiated.

The trend in Oakland now is to convert condo projects to rentals in lieu of the housing slump and the developers are eying the market.

“Currently, we anticipate selling them as condominiums,” said McCarthy. “However, depending on market conditions as we get closer to construction, there is the possibility to go rental in the short term. The first phase of residential construction is projected to start in 2012 with 213 units of market-rate condos and 90 affordable units, all built at the same time.”