

'Grand entrance' to downtown is approved

by Christian Brown, Staff Writer

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DOWNEY – Construction will soon begin on a 26,000-square-foot food court and retail center, which will occupy the southwest corner of Firestone Boulevard and Downey Avenue.

On Tuesday, the City Council approved a cost-sharing development agreement with Westland Industries, who will also help fund the reconstruction of Nance Avenue.

According to the staff report, the city has been negotiating with real estate investment group Westland Industries for several months regarding the transformation of its 1.15-acre property at 8236-8274 Firestone Boulevard.

The development, known as Downey Gateway, is projected to become a grand entrance into the downtown area and will extend across Firestone Boulevard, south to Nance Avenue from Downey Avenue to La Reina Avenue.

Approximately 50,000 square feet in size, the Downey Gateway site currently houses three buildings, including Gourmet Café, which together total more than 21,000 square feet. The proposed development calls for the two smaller structures on the property to be remodeled, and for the demolition of Gourmet Café, which will be replaced with two new buildings for a total of four structures.

Once completed the four structures will envelope an open-air plaza with water features and outdoor seating and dining for costumers. The project will provide 26,232 square feet of retail space and accommodate 13 tenants.

“We want to facilitate more retail establishments and restaurants in the downtown,” said John Perfitt, economic development director for the city of Downey. “We want to give residents more reasons to come to the downtown area by providing more unique options.”

While presenting his staff report before the City Council, Perfitt said Westland is courting several franchises for the new development including Waba Grill, Yogurtland, Ruby Tuesday, Fish Grill, and Round Table Pizza.

In order to provide adequate parking for the new development, the city will enter into a cost-sharing contract with Westland to facilitate the reconstruction of Nance Avenue into a public parking lot.

According to the staff report, the Nance Avenue conversion will create nearly 100 new parking spaces and will allow cars to travel both east and west-bound through the lot. The

improvements to Nance Avenue are anticipated to cost \$500,000, a sum that will be divided between Westland and the city.

Under the agreement, Westland is obligated to construct the parking lot and fund 70 percent, nearly \$350,000, of the total cost. The city will pay the remaining 30 percent, nearly \$150,000, using federal stimulus funds. In addition to the added parking, Nance Avenue will also receive a new eight-inch water line, a \$140,000 expense that will also be paid with stimulus funds.

After brief discussion, the City Council voted unanimously, noting the absence of Mayor Pro Tem Luis Marquez, to approve the agreement, which city officials believe will help revitalize the downtown district, which will soon accommodate Porto's Bakery.

"We've been looking at these pictures and redesigns for a long time – I'm real excited about this," said Councilman Mario Guerra. "It brings development to this site and the parking that we need. It's a great move, a beautiful development and hopefully one day we'll be able to enjoy yogurt outside there."

However, before construction can begin on the project, the Planning Commission must approve Westland's site plan, which includes the final building and landscape designs.

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