

Developers envision a ‘grand entrance’ to downtown

by Eric Pierce, City Editor

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DOWNEY – Will the Gourmet Café property at Firestone Boulevard and Downey Avenue be redeveloped into a new strip mall to serve as the de facto “grand entrance” to Downtown Downey?

The answer: possibly.

City officials met in closed session Tuesday night to discuss details of redevelopment plans with Westland Industries, a Long Beach-based commercial leasing company that owns the property at 8250 Firestone Blvd., where Gourmet Café is located.

Details of the meeting were not released. But Yanki Greenspan, an executive with Westland Industries, confirmed his company's desire to redevelop the land.

"We are planning on redeveloping our property," Greenspan said in an e-mail to the Patriot. "The city of Downey is working with us on entitlements and some parking issues that we are facing."

Regarding the future of Gourmet Café, Greenspan said, "Gourmet Café will be approached, when the time is right, regarding their participation in the project if they wish to continue tenancy at that location."

Frank Arias, who owns the Gourmet Café restaurant, said he knew nothing about redevelopment of the property.

"I wish I could help you, but I have no idea what's going on," Arias said. "You know more than I do right now."

LoopNet.com, an online commercial real estate listing service, is advertising a new strip mall on the site. According to LoopNet, the "existing center will be completely transformed into a high-traffic food court. Westland Industries is working closely with the city of Downey to create the 'grand entrance' to Downey's downtown." LoopNet has posted site plans and artist renderings, and advertises the property as "the first step to create the ideal pedestrian friendly downtown district."

Gilbert Livas, deputy city manager of community development for the city of Downey, downplayed the city's involvement in the redevelopment, but noted the property fell in the city's Downtown Outlay Zone.

Gourmet Cafe is almost directly across the street from what will soon become Porto's Bakery, which is expected to break ground later this year.

City officials have been aggressive in their efforts recently to breathe new life into the downtown. Last year, the city used housing money to purchase the Avenue Theatre and adjacent Verizon building, with plans to redevelop them at least partially into high-quality affordable housing.

Porto's is expected to attract up to 2,000 customers daily when they open on Firestone Boulevard, west of Downey Avenue. A two-story parking structure will be built to accommodate the expected increase in traffic.

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