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Burbank officials approve mixed-use project on Front Street



The Burbank City Council unanimously approved on Tuesday the LaTerra Select Burbank project at 777 N. Front St. The project includes a total of 573 apartments, a 307-room hotel and a new park. (File Photo)

By Anthony Clark Carpio
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A 7-acre dirt lot next to the 5 Freeway in Burbank will be developed with 573 apartment units and another hotel in the downtown Burbank area.

The Burbank City Council unanimously voted on Tuesday to approve the LaTerra Select Burbank project at 777 N. Front St., which will include a seven-story building with 252 units, an eight-story building with 321 units and a seven-story, 307-room hotel.

In addition to the apartments and hotel, developer LaTerra Development will construct a 28,000-square-foot public open space, a 1,067-square-foot public gallery space and build pedestrian access points — a set of stairs and two elevators — that will connect Front Street with the Magnolia Boulevard bridge to provide access to the downtown area as well as the Metrolink station.

Leonard Bechet, a senior planner for Burbank, told council members that the lot has stood vacant since 1991. Galpin Ford had purchased the site then and had planned to build a dealership there, but the project never came to fruition.

After all of the structures on the site were demolished in 2004, the lot has been used for several purposes, such as the location for Circus Vargas and, more recently, as material storage for Caltrans' 5 Freeway improvement project.

Along with all of the public improvements the developer will incorporate as part of the project, LaTerra Development will also give Burbank \$300,000 to use toward the city's pedestrian-and-bicycle project to connect the Metrolink station to downtown Burbank.

While the developer is set to make several public improvements, and the apartments will help the city reach its goal of the construction of 12,000 units over the next 15 years, the project does come with some anticipated drawbacks.

An environmental impact report for the project concluded that traffic is expected to become worse and cannot be mitigated in two areas — Front Street and Burbank Boulevard near the southbound 5 Freeway exit as well as Victory Place and Burbank Boulevard.

Additionally, several residents were against the project because they thought it did not offer enough affordable housing.

Of the 573 units, 69 will be restricted as affordable housing units for at least 55 years.

Burbank resident Ginny Barnett said during the council meeting the number of affordable units wasn't enough and added the project will likely increase the rents of other units in the city.

"I don't want to leave Burbank, but you know what? I may have to think about it because in two years I might not be able to afford to live here because of these luxury, high-rise things that are driving [up my rent]," she said.

Council members were also concerned about impacts on traffic, air quality given the project's proximity to the 5 Freeway and the number of affordable units included in the project, but they thought LaTerra Select Burbank was the right type of development for the site.

"If we're going to have additional housing in this city, it needs to go near transit," Mayor Emily Gabel-Luddy said, referring to the new access to the Metrolink station.

Anthony Clark Carpio

Anthony Clark Carpio is a reporter with the Burbank Leader. He joined the Times Community News staff on New Year's Eve 2012 and covers everything from the City Council to community events. He has a journalism degree from Cal State Northridge. Before reporting in Burbank, he was a reporter with the Huntington Beach Independent and a freelance reporter for the Pasadena Sun, the La Cañada Valley Sun and the Santa Clarita Signal.

