

Warner Center's Rocketdyne site slated for \$3 billion project

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Plans for a massive development in the West San Fernando Valley were released Wednesday, a \$3 billion project on the 47-acre Rocketdyne site that will include a mix of commercial, residential and high-rise buildings forming almost their own mini-city.

The project, now named LA Warner Center, will add more than 5 million square feet of development to the Canoga Park area, creating a retail and commercial hub that also will feature a 5-acre park open

to the community 24 hours.

It is being proposed amid a building boom in the area, including the \$350 million The Village at Westfield across the street from Rocketdyne and a series of new upscale apartment buildings that have risen in Canoga Park in recent years.

Boston Global Investments is in the early planning stages and working on the project with St. Louis-based HOK architectural firm's Los Angeles office and Los Angeles-based Arup, a engineering and design consulting firm.

"We just restarted about two weeks ago and we've got a long way to go yet," said Charles D. Reid, BGI's executive vice president. "We've got a lot of work to do. Even if we build half of what is proposed, it's going to be a huge boon to the community."

Community groups first learned the scope of the plan Wednesday.

"Wow. It's a big project," said Scott Silverstein, president of the Woodland Hills-Warner Center Neighborhood Council. "Well, the intent of the new Warner Center specific plans was to bring in Class A projects and from what I know of the plan it fits. But it is something everybody is going to have to look at."

The rectangular Rocketdyne site is bounded by Canoga and Owensmouth avenues and Vanowen Street and Victory Boulevard. It is owned by United Technologies Corp., the former owner of Rocketdyne. Once the development plan is complete and the entitlements are in place, UTC will sell the property to a developer, Reid said. The property will be vacated by Aerojet Rocketdyne by April 1, Reid said.

Wesfield's Village project is being built at Owensmouth and Victory; the open-air shopping and dining destination just had its groundbreaking this week. Further down Vanowen, a series of new apartment buildings were put up along Variel Avenue in the past few years and more are planned in other parts of Warner Center.

Collectively, the projects create a major economic impact in the area.

“Each of these projects involve a lot of construction jobs and they do create a ripple effect on the local economy,” said Robert Kleinhenz, chief economist at the Kyser Center for Economic Research in Los Angeles.

“When it comes to the point in time when the facilities become operational the question becomes where the capacity of the communities in the area is there to absorb more drinking and eating places. You’ve got to figure a company like Westfield is not engaged in a crapshoot. It’s because they know the demographics over time are going to support another center (and other facilities).

The BGI project will include 3.95 million square feet of residential space and 1.1 million square feet of offices. The high-rise project also will include cultural and public space, an assisted living facility, shops and a 155,000 square foot hotel. The exact height of the buildings has not been determined.

Reid said the BGI project would complement Westfield’s.

“We’re not competing with Westfield. This is a live, work and play community,” Reid said.

Westfield senior vice president Larry Green declined comment.

BGI is known for taking on big projects. They include the 1.1 million square foot State Street Financial Center tower in Boston and the Songdo International Business District, a new city on 1,500 acres of reclaimed land near Seoul, South Korea.

The project will transform an industrial site, now occupied by time-worn Rocketdyne facilities, “into a new urban neighborhood with a dynamic mix of residences, office space, retail shops, hotels and civic institutions,” according to a description on BGI’s Website.

UTC’s plan and BGI’s involvement were first reported by the Daily News in 2011. But work was placed on hold so the project would be consistent with the Warner Center 2035 plan, a blueprint for future development of the area, that was being put together.

The Warner Center plan was approved in October and the main goal was having pedestrian travel, not cars, be the main driving force for future development.

Reid said that the project’s housing and office density and other specs comply with the plan and it will be a green, transit-oriented development. It will be directly across Canoga Avenue from an Orange Line station.

“The thinking of the consulting team is in line with the Warner Center specific plan. UTC wants a development plan that is in line with the Warner Center specific plan and a plan that is a plus for the community,” Reid said.

Amenities for residents, workers and visitors include the park as well as other open spaces, sidewalk retail and a “walkable, live-work-recreation environment,” the company said.

The planning will include environmentally sustainable design strategies to conserve water, reduce

greenhouse gas emissions and optimize energy use.

Los Angeles City Councilman Bob Blumenfield said BGI briefed him on the plan about a week ago.

“It is a very key location for the West Valley. That site at the moment is very under utilized,” Blumenfield said. “The thing that excites me about it is the green aspect and the jobs aspect. This could be the opportunity to bring some corporate anchors into the area and that could help with economic development.”

Blumenfield said the plan will get plenty of scrutiny as it unfolds.

“Before anything like this would move forward there would be a tremendous amount of community outreach and engagement that would be involved,” he said.

John M. Walker, vice president of the Woodland Hills Homeowners Organization, said the ambitions plan gives Warner Center’s image a boost.

“The details of the project will determine whether this will be a good thing for the community. What they say they are going to build is not always what they build or should have built,” he said of developers in general. “But I think it would be fair to say that developers are now recognizing that Warner Center is a world-class destination for development.”

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