

Granville in escrow on blighted Blackstone parcel

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A 70-bed facility for young adults, as well as retail uses, are in store for the southwest corner of Blackstone and Clinton avenues. Developer Darius Assemi is planning to redevelop a blighted parcel at the southwest corner of Blackstone and Clinton avenues in Fresno that was once earmarked for a new Smart & Final.

“We are in escrow right now and hope to close the deal some time in January or February,” Assemi said.

Although the final design of the new development has not been finished, Assemi confirmed the project will include a “70-bed facility” that will house young adults “who have aged out of the foster care system.”

The developer, through his company Granville Homes, said he is working on the project together with the Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission.

Pressed for more specific details, Assemi said the development could also include a mixed-use commercial and/or retail component.

The blighted Blackstone and Clinton parcel, which currently includes a boarded-up former Chinese restaurant, large parking lot as well as adjacent vacant residential properties, gained attention earlier this year when Smart & Final pulled out of a deal to build a new store at the site.

Rich Development, the Southern California-based firm behind that failed project, reportedly ran into issues complying with Fresno’s new General Plan. Last month, Smart & Final finally opened its store in a former Save Mart location

just north across Clinton Avenue from the original site.

Assemi is confident about his project's prospects for approval, saying it would fit with city leaders' vision of a redeveloped Blackstone corridor that promotes mixed-use development and so-called "walkability."

"We are just waiting for the new development code to be approved," Assemi added. "The longer it takes for that to happen, the more projects get backed up in the pipeline."

When contacted this week, officials at the Fresno EOC were tight-lipped about their potential involvement in the project.

Kristine Morgan, marketing and communications specialist for the organization, said in an emailed response that she could neither "confirm nor deny that there is a project [under] consideration" with Assemi's development team.

Officials within the Swearingin administration also declined to comment on the project.

But Clint Olivier, city councilman for Fresno's 7th District, which includes that section of Blackstone Avenue, said this week: "I know that the property's in escrow and that Darius is doing it."

"I'm really excited that the corner of Clinton and Blackstone is getting a second chance," Olivier added. "I'm really looking forward to seeing what Granville has in store."

Olivier, who lives just a few blocks from the parcel himself, said, "I know my neighbors really want to see something go in on that corner. They had hoped for an improved neighborhood when Smart & Final wanted to go there and they will have hope again when they learn of Granville's commitment to their area."

The Chinese restaurant has been boarded up and "an eyesore" for years, Olivier said.

"That corner has been a problem for a long time. With a boarded up restaurant and now boarded up tire shop and homes, it embodies everything that's wrong with our older neighborhoods. "

Olivier has grabbed headlines recently with his call for Fresno to step up efforts citywide to deal with "the chokehold vagrants have on our city."

"Nearly everyone in Fresno knows our city's neighborhoods are under siege," Olivier wrote in a recent op-ed published by the Fresno Bee.

Since being elected to the city council in 2010, Olivier has made the redevelopment of the Blackstone corridor one of his top priorities.

"That corner of Blackstone and Clinton has been a magnet for vagrant activity for years," he said this week. "Seeing Darius Assemi and Granville make such an investment is really encouraging. When this project gets done, its really going to be a great example of giving older neighborhoods a new lease on life."

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