

Fresno developer Darius Assemi sees potential in blighted Blackstone and Clinton property

By BoNhia Lee
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The beautiful thing about a blighted piece of property with a boarded-up Chinese restaurant and vacant homes at Blackstone and Clinton avenues in central Fresno is the location, Fresno developer Darius Assemi says.

Assemi, head of [Granville Homes](#), says the 3.5-acre property once slated for a [Smart & Final](#) grocery store is within walking distance of [Fresno City College](#), employment opportunities and public transportation. “You could live there and not even have a need to own a car,” he said.

The developer is in the process of buying the parcel that sits on a busy corner of Fresno’s central core but says he doesn’t know what will go there yet.

There are several options, Assemi says. One could be general housing or for college students. A mixed-use residential and retail project could be possible, or even a home for youths who age out of the foster-care system.

“We’re just beginning to look at what could be done on this site,” Assemi said. “We’re looking at what the potentials are, what the challenges are and we’re going through that due-diligence process.”

The plan for the property, which is zoned for mixed use, Assemi says, has to go through the city approval process. The project details should come together by the end of the year or early next year, he says.

It is not clear how much Assemi is buying the property for. Fresno County property records show the Mills Family Trust, of Clovis, owns the property.

Whatever the plan is, “we believe that it probably could be aligned with what the city would want,” Assemi says.

To go from where we were just a few months ago to having a new development proposal at this corner is a terrific response from the private sector.

Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin, referring to the abandoned plans to put a Smart & Final store on the property that developer Darius Assemi is now buying

Earlier this year, Southern California-based developer [Rich Development](#) had plans to build a 28,000-square-foot building on the lot for Smart & Final. Several smaller buildings, including a restaurant, would have completed the project.

But the plan turned into a dispute between the city and the retailer over the design of the corner as it related to the city’s new general plan. The administration of Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin wanted the two smaller buildings to front Blackstone Avenue. Smart & Final, wanting its store to be seen from the street, preferred only one building along Blackstone.

The retailer gave up on the site and in September opened its new store in the building vacated by Save Mart across



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the street on the northwest corner of Clinton and Blackstone.

Then Assemi started looking.

“We believe that part of town could be a catalyst for revitalizing that Blackstone corridor,” he said.

You could live there and not even have a need to own a car.

Developer Darius Assemi about the possibilities for a parcel on the southwest corner of Blackstone and Clinton avenues in central Fresno

Making Blackstone more walkable and inviting to people is an essential part of the city’s plan to modernize and beautify its business corridors.

“To go from where we were just a few months ago to having a new development proposal at this corner is a terrific response from the private sector,” Swearingin said. “We’re looking forward to supporting the project.”

Fresno City Council member Clint Olivier, who represents the area and lives nearby, is happy to see a renewed interest in a site that has plagued the neighborhood and the city for years.

“We almost had a big victory with Smart & Final, but things fell through,” Olivier said. “So, I’m very excited about the idea of something neat and new going on that corner.”

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