

Truckee railyard gets a redevelopment boost

http://www.sacbee.com/288/story/1975209.html?mi_rss=Bee%20State%20News

By Barbara Barte Osborn

Bee correspondent

Published: Thursday, Jun. 25, 2009 - 12:00 am | Page 3B

TRUCKEE –

Development of this city's historic, long-vacant railyard has received a giant boost with the Town Council's recent approval of amaster plan and environmental impact report.

Mostly abandoned since a lumber mill closed in the 1980s, the 75-acre property just east



Truckee's long-vacant railyard could become home to a hotel, offices, shops and residential units if plans stay on track. The Town Council recently approved a master plan and environmental impact report on the 75-acre site just east of Commercial Row. If fully developed, the project could double the size of downtown Truckee.

of Commercial Row could double the size of downtown once developed.

"It will probably take longer because the economy's in such turmoil, but it's a great plan, and I anticipate it will be built out," said Rick Holliday, the railyard's main land owner.

He projects construction on the first building, a hotel, could take up to two years to begin, while full build-out could be in "eight years on the fastest track and 15 on the longest."

Holliday, who owns Holliday Development in Emeryville, has worked with town staff during the last half of the decade the plan has been under way. It has garnered widespread, though not universal, public support – unusual for Truckee developments – with its emphasis on in-fill rather than sprawl.

The plan includes a mix of retail, residential and office buildings on approximately two-thirds of the property, with pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle access.

Although traffic, noise, water, air and other issues have been addressed in an environmental impact report, each building proposal will have to undergo design review, said Denyelle Nishimori, a town associate planner.

Review on the first phase, which includes a hotel, theater and mixed residential-retail buildings, can start "as soon as he (Holliday) enters a proposal," she said.

Holliday said he is working with a potential hotel builder but eventually would like to see other builders involved.

The town's plan allows up to 570 residential units, 70,000 square feet of retail shops, 15,000 square feet of office space, a civic center, grocery store, theater, hotel and open space, Nishimori said.

Development would require moving the Union Pacific Railroad "balloon track," a circular track used to turn snowplow engines, to the east and realigning Donner Pass Road.

Holliday projects hotel construction could start in 18 months or two years. He said the individuals who operate the luxury Hotel Healdsburg in Sonoma County are lined up for the Truckee hotel, but financing still must be arranged.

For the theater block, Holliday said, "we need to re-engage our conversations with Robert Redford and the Sundance people. They like what we've got there, but again, because of the economy, this part will probably take longer as well."

Many Truckee merchants and residents say they believe the project will be good for the town.

The Mountain Area Preservation Foundation, Truckee Donner Historical Society, Truckee Donner Railroad Society and Truckee River Watershed Council have formally backed the project.

The plan was not without opposition, though. A group called "Friends of Truckee," represented at the Town Council meeting by Siobhan Smart, owner of the

Wagon Train Coffee Shop, purchased an ad in the local newspaper, the Sierra Sun, protesting the plan.

In a letter to the Town Council, the group said it objects to the project's plan to remove a historic railroad warehouse and expressed concerns about potential environmental impacts and health risks from soil and groundwater contamination.