

Lincoln Crossing—Generally Good Marks so Far

By R.A. Lovka

West Altadena's long awaited Lincoln Crossing development is moving toward completion this summer, and the work thus far is generating favorable comments from area residents. And while some voice concerns over design changes from the original Eric Lloyd Wright building plans, overall, the community is giving a "thumbs-up" to the project.

Lincoln Crossing is the result of more than 15 years of neighborhood and LACDC (County of Los Angeles, Community Development Commission) efforts to revitalize a rundown commercial corridor along Lincoln Avenue in West Altadena into a mixed-use retail and housing center.

The saga is a long one, with outcries for a full-service neighborhood supermarket going back to the 1980s.

In 2001, area residents finally saw some positive movement toward real action with a series of community envisioning meetings in which residents spelled out a wish list for any proposed development. Eventually a developer—Dorn-Platz—was chosen, and conceptual plans were drawn by architect Eric Lloyd Wright. The concept called for an environmentally-based "green architecture" building design, a courtyard plaza, retail structures and loft-style housing, with parking structures. A Dorn-Platz staple to their developments—a 24-hour Fitness Facility—would anchor the eastern corner of Lincoln and Woodbury roads.

Groundbreaking for Lincoln Crossing commenced in March, 2005, and today nearly all of the architectural construction has been completed.

The Magic Johnson 24-Hour Fitness center, with spa, pool and exercise facilities, has been operating for over a month. Last Saturday, the former Lakers star was on-hand for the center's official ribbon cutting.

Some procedural matters along the way and recent weather and have delayed completion of other components of the project, which was hoped to be fully operational this past January.

"At one point, the developer changed contractors from Summit Builders to Swinerton and that pushed back completion," notes Sharon Warfield, project manager for the CDC. "Then County regulations, the permitting process and some plan revisions all took time. Rain stopped us on some things—all those will push your schedule behind."

Still, the project remains positive to most.

"We've never had anything on this scale before in West Altadena," said Tecumseh Shackelford of the West Altadena Neighborhood Association. "This project is beautiful; it's providing jobs, and we'll have services in the area we never had. Before, we had empty lots and liquor stores. The neighborhood people are very happy with what's going on."

That observation is echoed by Altadena Town Councilman Bobby Thompson, who sits on the West Altadena Project Area Committee (PAC) that provides community oversight for the project. "At our last PAC meeting, we had people speaking positively about the project during Public Comment. I think the community is very pleased with what's been going on."

The goings-on have been substantial.

Phase One of the project is nearly 90% leased according to the developer, and the supermarket building is substantially complete, with numerous skylights creating a very open feel to the interior.

Mid-summer is the outlook for the opening of a number of retail and food outlets in the development: Panda Express and Subway have leased sites, as has a local food service operation, Bessie's Soulfood Tacos. Longtime area pharmacy, Nats Pharmacy, has recently completed its plan, with work starting on their site in the next few weeks. Other "locals" moving into the new project this summer are: Pansy's Cleaners, Nail Studio One, and the local shoe store, Your Sole Place. An expanded BUR Office Supply takes residence with a new shipping and mailing center.

Building Three on the site will house a 5000 sq. ft. full-service Bank of America. Upper story rental housing units will complete the structure. A promised walking and seating plaza is under construction between this building and the 24-Hour Fitness.

Still, the project and its design deviations from Eric Lloyd Wright's original conceptions have their critics.

Writing on an internet blog, resident Camille Dudley charges that the project is a "...second rate shopping center instead of first class development designed by a renowned architect..." and that the community is being given a "bait and switch" by the developer.

Town Councilman Steve Lamb agrees.

"I'm very disappointed with Lincoln Crossing," he told MVN News Magazine. "It started out as a project designed for and by this community with various amenities included through Eric Lloyd Wright. It's all been stripped away by the developer and it's turned into a Money-is-The-Only-Thing--That-Matters project... It's the nightmare we had hoped to avoid."

As to the design, CDC's Warfield notes that "Eric Lloyd Wright is still consulting. He did all the conceptual design. Then the production architects, Onyx, had their input. There are always design changes in any development."

Laura Whelan notes that Wright "...is considered the design architect—the senior architect on the project—with Onyx Architects as the production architect. Onyx put together most of the construction documents."

Both feel that deviations from the earliest proposed designs are cosmetic and cost-based, while not affecting the overall concept and quality of the development.

Phase Two of the multi-phased project is currently in "very early" preliminary conceptual design, according to Whelan. That portion of the project will stretch along the east side of Lincoln.

"We're working with the County on parcel acquisition plans, and trying to determine what kind of shopping, business and housing mix will work best. Land and construction costs have spiraled up, so we want to be realistic about density and design issues. There are a lot of parcels to acquire."

As for continued community involvement, Whelan said that "Rough conceptuals were presented at the last PAC meeting to solicit community input as to what residents want to see in Phase Two."

Meanwhile, Lincoln Crossing seems to be getting a "thumbs up" from prospective businesses, too.

"We already have proposals from businesses interested in getting into Phase Two sites," notes Whelan. "Another bank and some retail businesses have contacted us. We're very pleased with the leasing interest and with the way leasing in Phase One has gone."