

I've bolded some parts of this Sac Bee story. Oddly enough, the housing potential, 1,800 units, is the same as what I estimated for the "Smart Corridor" from Hayward BART along Mission to CSUEB Hayward. Our light rail equivalent would be the Village Bus and Beeline Bus. Sherman Lewis

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Old college try; The city hopes to create a vibrant area around CSUS

By Terri Hardy -- Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento State student Eric Guerra has a vision: one day, a campus community that doesn't roll up its sidewalks by 5 p.m.

His traditionally **commuter school has been evolving, attracting younger students who want to live, work and unwind in areas within walking distance** of the J Street campus. Over the past decade, campus statistics show the percentage of students ages 19 and younger has almost doubled, to 23 percent.

"More students are looking to be on campus a majority of their time," Guerra said. "After class, students don't want to just get in their car and drive home anymore."

The trend hasn't gone unnoticed by city leaders. They have taken several **steps toward creating a college town** around California State University, Sacramento. Over the next two decades, they envision a campus integrated with the surrounding community, much like the **college town atmosphere in Davis or Chico, or even mini-versions of Berkeley or Westwood.**

The plan would transform an area perforated with grim, vacant lots and a run-down industrial feel into a **smart urban village**. The target area of almost 200 acres stretches from Elvas Avenue in the north, past Highway 50 to San Joaquin Street in the south and crosses through the northeast corner of some east Sacramento neighborhoods. Busy 65th Street would serve as the village's "Main Street."

Planners envision quaint stretches of **shops with housing overhead; pathways** to allow students and faculty to walk and bike to the campus; **restaurants; bookstores; and coffee shops -- all with easy access to light rail.** There would be **nearly 1,800 housing units -- apartments, town houses and single-family homes** -- as well as 680,000 square feet of retail space.

City officials recognized it was a prime area for development. It is already bustling: a growing campus expected to reach 29,000 students in the fall, about 2,000 workers at nearby SMUD and state Transportation Department offices, and Regional Transit's fifth-busiest light-rail station. They knew the area contained **several prime parcels for development.**

But instead of approving projects piecemeal, the Sacramento City Council decided to take a **"smart growth" approach** and develop an overall concept for the area, then encourage infill and reuse projects that move forward those ideas of **combining business and housing, and using alternative transportation.**

"This is the first project like this to really take off," said City Council member Steve Cohn, whose district includes the 65th Street area. "We're really hoping to see that the area becomes a college district."

Councilman Dave Jones says the plan is a **boon to the campus and the community that ultimately will raise property values significantly.**

"It's going to be a much **more attractive, more vibrant area,**" Jones said.

CSUS has been **cloistered from the rest of the community in part because of its physical layout**, surrounded by busy roadways, the American River and the railroad levy. When state

leaders pushed to create the city's first four-year university, those physical barriers worried the site selection committee.

However, the state decided to go ahead with the purchase of the American River site since other potential locations did not have enough acreage, and the land was purchased in 1949, according to campus historian George Craft in his book "California State University, Sacramento, The First Forty Years: 1947-1987."

"That rail grade really, really walls off the university from its community," said Robert Jones, vice president of university affairs at CSUS.

The campus community fully supports the transit village plan, seeing it as a way to help break down those barriers and enhance students' university experience.

"They're less likely to jump in their car and take off, they'll stop and linger, and that would be great," Jones said.

As student needs have changed, a "radical departure" is planned on campus with the **addition of more dormitory space**. Across the state, officials at several CSU campuses are looking to enhance student life with more housing and a more townlike ambiance, said CSU spokeswoman Colleen Bentley-Adler.

At CSU Fresno, for example, there are plans to transform 45 acres on campus into housing, hotel rooms, office space and retail shops with help from private developers.

"The younger students now coming to the CSU want that more traditional campus feel," Bentley-Adler said.

In Sacramento, the transit village project is envisioned in two phases north and south of Highway 50. In October 2002, the City Council adopted a set of development policies and design guidelines for the northern piece after reviewing an environmental report and holding public hearings.

Planners believe major catalyst projects should be completed within five years, with a total transformation taking place over 20 years.

The southern phase is likely to be designed with more residential than commercial development in mind, but it will still incorporate the same design concepts. Officials also envision a 6-acre park, the area's first. Plans are still being drafted and are not yet available for public review, but an environmental study could be ready this summer, said Steve Peterson, principal planner for the city's long-range planning section.

The city has approved plans for a 165,000-square-foot office and retail building near 65th Street and the light-rail line. The council also approved plans for Jefferson Commons, a 288-unit **student housing complex to include furnished units, individual leases, study rooms, sand volleyball courts and a resort-style pool**.

Price Wagner, a vice president for Texas-based JPI Apartment Development, said the company noticed that CSUS was among California's fastest-growing colleges and that the area's student housing was relatively old. Construction is expected to start this summer, and the apartments could be ready for fall 2004.

Also, Mark Friedman of Fulcrum Capital is working on plans to build a retail and loft housing building on a portion of the vacant lot on 65th Street and Folsom Boulevard.

Friedman, who developed the shopping complex at First Street and Richards Boulevard near the University of California, Davis, said the Sacramento project would be similar but with a more industrial, urban feel.

"I promise something edgy and exciting," Friedman said. "I thought that the Sacramento

campus lacked a front door or that college 'main street' feel many campuses have. This project can be a first step toward creating that kind of neighborhood."

Guerra, president of Associated Students at CSUS, said his group has concerns that the new housing might not be truly affordable for students.

Developers say they will work to ensure rents make sense. And because the city is looking to classify the area as a redevelopment area, officials will be required to put 20 percent of the property taxes collected from redevelopment into low-income housing, said Kim King, program manager for the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency.

Some east Sacramento residents were unhappy with the prospect of change in the neighborhood. Their biggest concern was about increased traffic on their quiet streets, said Dick Ratliff, president of the East Sacramento Improvement Association.

They attended several forums to discuss the plan and worked out a compromise -- city officials promised **traffic-calming measures** if needed and said a parking garage might be provided near the rail line. And while some residents weren't appeased, Ratliff said most are resigned to the changes since it was clear the city intended to go ahead with the plan.

"My impression is that the city heard our concerns but had to weigh that against what they were trying to accomplish," Ratliff said. "They just didn't want a bunch of office buildings in the area, they wanted to be proactive and plan what the area should look like."

Guerra -- a graduating senior -- only wishes that the area had been transformed a little earlier. Good, affordable housing has been hard to find near campus, and student life has been somewhat lacking.

"We don't want Sac State to end up like San Jose or San Francisco, where they can't hire faculty, and students can't find a place to live," Guerra said. "This area, frankly, is blighted. Any changes are going to foster the education experience."