

Tarzana council proposing Orange Line village

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When Los Angeles civic leaders talk about building taller structures and more multifamily homes along transit lines, they're probably not envisioning projects in placid, suburban Tarzana.

But that's just what the Tarzana Neighborhood Council has proposed for the area around the Orange Line station on Reseda Boulevard.

Tarzana Crossing would be what some call a transit village or an urban village - with shops, restaurants, offices and apartments or condos within one-quarter mile of the station.

It would be an environment ideal for walking. Buildings could reach up to six stories in the core, with shops on the ground floor attracting those on foot to window-shop and people-watch.

"I think there are a lot of people in the Valley who understand that we live in a city, and it's OK for parts of it to reflect that and be urban," said Joe Bernstein, a Tarzana resident and land-use consultant who heads the neighborhood council subcommittee that conceived Tarzana Crossing.

The concept, Bernstein said, was also born out of a realization that population density is coming to Tarzana and other places along the Orange Line, whether residents want it or not.

"We know the city is interested in some development change along the transit corridor. We wanted to get it right - the right balance of residential, commercial and industrial for Tarzana."

Tarzana Crossing is just a concept right now. The neighborhood council has spoken to the Planning Department staff and may work with a graduate student at California State University, Northridge, to translate the vision into the neighborhood's zoning rules.

But city planners are impressed by the neighborhood council's plan and by members' openness to new ideas about density.

"Usually we're fighting with people over development. This neighborhood council isn't saying no to mixed-use development. They're saying we want this," said Emily Gabel Luddy, who heads the Planning Department's new Urban Design Studio.

"I hope this is the beginning of people thinking about what they can do in local areas. I hope it will spread."

There is a movement by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's office and Planning General Manager Gail Goldberg to develop urban villages along the city's transit lines.

Up to now, the focus has been on the Gold Line, from Pasadena to downtown, and the planned Expo Line from downtown to Culver City - through communities that are usually more willing to accept density.

So Villaraigosa's Urban Planning and Design Coordinator Krista Kline said she was pleasantly surprised to hear about Tarzana Crossing.

"I think we'd like to work with the community and the council office to start talking about this in a more formal way."

Kline said the city must change its pattern of development to accommodate a booming population and dearth of vacant land.

"We have to build higher. In order to do that and still make the community livable, you have to make communities better than they are now.

"You have to build neighborhoods where people can exist without getting in their cars, and they're comfortable with that," she said.

Tarzana Neighborhood Council members said their vision will help develop a better community in the future.

"People have an inherent desire to identify with a place," said Scott Albright, who sits on the neighborhood council subcommittee and is a Santa Monica city planner.

"Maybe in the past this may have seemed out of line to think that a non-autocentric place could be created. After all, this is still the Valley.

"However, as the Valley's demographics have changed, so have the habits, thoughts and patterns of its population."

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