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Proposed Vermont Manchester Project Advances

After being a source of blight for 25 years, a vacant lot spanning two city blocks in Southwest Los Angeles is poised to be transformed into a Los Angeles County facility offering a range of critical services, including housing, transit, job training, retail and a school for underserved youth.

The Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 to acquire ownership of the property at the corner of Vermont and Manchester Avenues, which has remained mostly undeveloped since being decimated during the civil unrest of 1992. Over the decades, it has received more than three dozen notices of violations from the City of Los Angeles.

“The County now has an opportunity to construct what will be a catalytic project that would meet many of the needs of the surrounding community,” Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas said. “It’s on a prominent corridor where it can catalyze additional investments in all directions. With meaningful community engagement moving forward, we can design tremendous amenities that can make the corner of Vermont and Manchester a source of pride once again, rather than a long-standing example of stagnation and even worse.”

The elements of the proposed project reflect the priorities of the recently adopted South Los Angeles Community Plan, as well as recent surveys by the Public Health Department and local community organizations. The proposed project

includes 180 affordable housing units; 50,000 square feet on the ground floor to serve community needs, potentially including social services and transit career training centers; a transit plaza and parking lot; a public college preparatory boarding school designed to serve 400 youth from 6th to 12th grades who are currently served by the County's social safety net; and retail shops. The acquisition is expected to cause minimal disruption as the site is vacant.

Several members of the community, as well as two elected officials, spoke in support of the proposed project. "Over and over, residents have been promised various degrees of redevelopment, resources, jobs and housing on this site, yet there it sits, 25 years later, occasionally filling with trash, periodically hosting trespassers," U.S. Rep. Karen Bass said in a letter to the Board. "The area sits vacant, and the nuisance created by its disuse and neglect causes problems with health, blight and crime. By contrast, the County proposes to meet multiple needs here and serve the broader community."

"Having spent the last 25 years in and around this particular set of parcels, this proposal comes as a great relief to me and thousands of other folks," added Los Angeles City Councilman Marqueece Harris-Dawson, who noted there have been multiple reports of crime on the vacant lot.

Pastor Aguilar Williams, Jr., a longtime resident, said, "We have no confidence in the developer. The developer has had this property vacant for more than 25 years. It's abandoned and it's really serving no purpose in our community."

Danielle Strickland, with the Southwest Neighborhood Council, added, "We deserve to have a place where we can enjoy some amenities in our own community, instead of having to look at this eyesore that's been there for forever."

Following the Board's unanimous vote, Supervisor Ridley-Thomas declared, "The comments generally underscore the fact that investment is sorely needed at this location. The community has waited way too long, and now is the time for us to move forward." He called the proposed project an "opportunity to right a wrong for which this community has suffered over decades."

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