

# The San Diego Union-Tribune

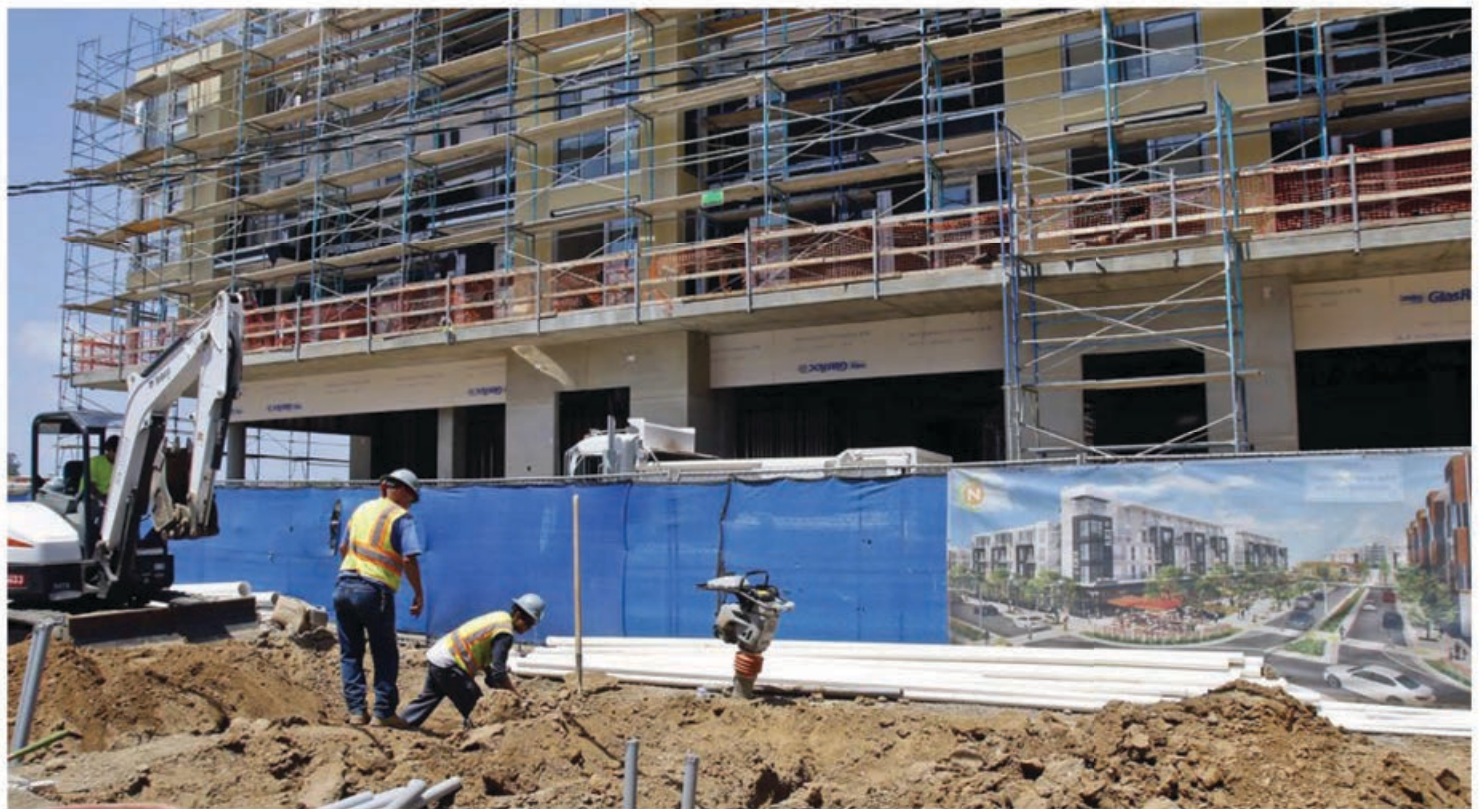
## New projects spark start of North County 'Gaslamp'

Developers envision urban work-play neighborhood near Cal State San Marcos



By Teri Figueroa

May 6, 2016



Construction workers dig a trench at the Block C apartment complex, under construction in San Marcos. The apartment complex linked to a long-term project dubbed North City. The idea of the project is to create an urban core right next to Cal State San Marcos. *Don Boomer*

An ambitious plan to turn the area around Cal State San Marcos into an urban village that would echo downtown San Diego's Gaslamp neighborhood is beginning to take shape, with one project complete and several more in the works.

The \$1 billion live-work district would encompass roughly 204 acres along the South Twin Oaks Valley Road corridor, an area the city has designated as the University District. Developers have branded their vision North City (<http://www.northcity.co/>).

The first project sprouted in 2014 with the opening of The Quad, a student housing complex across the street from the school. Since then, crews have been hammering away at the next phase.



Market-rate apartments — a set of five-story buildings with a center courtyard — should open by August with a coffee shop and restaurant on the ground floor. A medical trade school, a large parking garage and a craft brewery are coming soon on neighboring blocks.

North City could eventually include about 3,400 residential units, a hotel and roughly 700,000 square feet of commercial space, including perhaps 300,000 square feet of retail, said Gary Levitt, who is developing the project with partner Mike McDonald.

The pair envision a master-planned downtown with a hip vibe and a walkable mix of housing, shops and restaurants all less than a mile from the university.

There's no interest in "parking lots with buildings around the edges," Levitt said. Expect to see vibrant cafes, artisanal markets and small specialty grocers — "little shops that have things you didn't know existed," he said.

Achieving that vision means convincing developers to sign on and build in the area at a time when other North County cities — including Carlsbad, Escondido, Vista — are cultivating their own downtown live-work dreams.

Levitt hopes that as North City rises, his product pitch will become easier. "We spend a lot of time explaining what we are doing," Levitt said. "But at some point, it will start developing itself."

The project would eventually connect with San Marcos' long-planned Creek District, a collection of residential, commercial and open-space areas that city leaders say will become the city's first true downtown. Officials said the Creek District and University District are distinct neighborhoods and there's room for both in rapidly growing region.

San Marcos is completely behind North City, which "will be a destination for young, talented professionals," said Mayor Jim Desmond.

The urban vibe "is a good mix, particularly by the university," the mayor said. "It's another element that San Marcos has to offer."

## **Efforts on the east side**

About a third of North City's land is on the east side of busy Twin Oaks Valley Road, on flat land essentially along the south border of Cal State San Marcos. (Construction on the west side of the road is years away and will require shaving off the top of a hill overlooking the freeway.)

Construction is already under way on the five-story, nearly 200-unit apartment complex dubbed Block C. Across the street, craft brewer Urge Gastropub is opening a site that could offer bocci ball and eight bowling lanes.

To the south of Block C, work is slated to start soon on a 60,000-square-foot, three-story building overlooking state Route 78.

The first two floors will house the Tucson-based Pima Medical Institute (<http://pmi.edu/>), which offers certificates and associate degrees and has 16 schools in eight states. The San Marcos campus could draw 600 students and create 90 jobs.

Pima President and CEO Fred Freedman said he has been looking to create a North County campus for about five years, but was waiting for the right spot.

The live-work concept, easy transit access and the proximity to Cal State San Marcos made North City a great choice, he said.

"I can be in the center of the hub of the academic community of North County," Freedman said. "I am all in."

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