

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)

Gateway complex breaks new ground

Developers will build new housing complex in the style of campus buildings.

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Construction on the University Gateway Project has broken ground on the corner of Figueroa Street and Jefferson Boulevard where the Felix Chevrolet Cadillac car dealership formerly stood and is expected to be completed before the fall of 2010.

Urban Partners LLC is managing the project, which will accommodate approximately 1,600 students in more than 400 apartment units, and is working closely with the university to ensure that students' needs will be met by the housing facility.

"I think the university's goals in working with Urban Partners on this project was to ensure that a quality student housing project evolved," said Kristina Raspe, associate senior vice president for real estate and asset management at the university. "Our involvement was to help the developer determine what the students' needs were and make sure it was a quality development and managed well."

Matt Burton, a principal at Urban Partners overseeing the Gateway Project, said the company has worked with the university since it began planning the project in 2003 to make sure it was living up to the standards and expectations of the university and the administration.

"I consider them a partner in this, though not a financial partner," he said. "They've been great to work with and they've been very helpful in giving information about what students want."

The housing complex will be built in a style that will fit with the university's predominant architectural theme and will provide amenities for students such as bike racks, according to representatives from Clark Construction Group, LLC, the construction company Urban Partners hired to build the project.

The new facility will also provide parking spots to about half of its residents as well as retail on the bottom level, which could include restaurants, a pharmacy, a grocery store, a Greek merchandise store and a gym, Raspe said.

"There will be a whole host of residential amenities that we will provide for the students to use," Burton said.

The Gateway Project, named because of its location near the north entrance of the campus along the Figueroa Corridor, has been in the works for several years and was originally expected to begin construction in 2005 and be finished in 2007, the Daily Trojan reported in 2004.

Urban Partners and USC sued Conquest in September 2007, alleging that Conquest attempted to delay the Gateway Project by filing lawsuits and had also tried to gain a monopoly on the housing market

around USC.

While the lawsuit delayed construction, Urban Partners and USC eventually prevailed. The settlement, which was made in January, barred Conquest from the right to sue housing companies or impede construction on any project within a 2-mile radius of campus.

Burton declined to comment on the lawsuit.

With the lawsuit out of the way, Urban Partners is now moving forward with the Gateway Project, Raspe said.

"All the work that had been delayed was immediately started," she said. "I think the lawsuit delayed the project about two years."

The project is now on a tight schedule and will need to be completed before the fall 2010 semester to ensure that students will be able to live there during the school year.

"These projects need to open in an August time frame," said Brian League, program director of Capital Construction Development, the university development company that advised Urban Partners during its initial planning stage. "You can't open up a student housing project midyear."

Clark Construction representatives said they were confident that construction delays would not prevent the facility from opening at its scheduled time.

This project is in line with the University Park Campus Master Plan, which is the university's outline for development in the next 30 years.

Cesar Armendariz, University Park Master Plan communication director, said that while the Gateway Project is not directly a part of the plan, it still helps the university move toward its ultimate goal of providing housing for all undergraduates.

"It's 1,600 less beds the university will have to build..." Armendariz said. "It serves an immediate need. We need the beds. Our students are overcrowded in conditions out in the community and that just draws them closer to us."

Burton said he hopes that the construction of the Gateway Project will bring more foot traffic to the Figueroa Corridor and help bring further development to the area between USC and the Staples Center.

"We would hope that it would have a very positive impact in the neighborhood and the community," he said. "It's not the easiest place to develop but hopefully this will spur more development along the Figueroa area."

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