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LOCAL NEWS

Firefighters back Caruso project

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ARCADIA — Five minutes after getting a call, the Arcadia Fire Department expects to be on the scene.

It would seem unlikely those navigating the clogged arteries of city traffic with such urgency would back a massive development project, but the firefighters union said Tuesday it expects The Shops at Santa Anita to make their jobs easier.

"This is a large benefit for us," said Jack Twitchell, president of the Arcadia Firefighters Association, at a press conference where the firefighters endorsed the project.

Developer Rick Caruso's proposal for a 829,000-square-foot shopping, office and entertainment complex at the site of the Santa Anita Race Track is expected to put another 15,000 cars on Arcadia's streets daily.

According to a review of how Caruso will counter those impacts, upgrades and improvements to city streets and technology will actually result in improved traffic flow.

"If anyone is concerned about traffic, it's these guys [firefighters]," said Caruso, CEO of Caruso Affiliated.

Much of the \$10 million to \$12 million Caruso anticipates spending to address traffic will go toward upgrading outdated traffic technology.

His decision to remove residential apartments from the project last year and resubmit his plan, Twitchell said, demonstrated his willingness to work with the community. Apartments would have created a "live, sitting problem, 24 hours a day," he said.

The fire department responds, on average, in 4.09 minutes, according to the environmental review.

Twitchell and Caruso said they would hold future meetings to discuss specific requests that could be incorporated into the project, including a possible outpost or office for emergency responders.

Should The Shops at Santa Anita be built, City Hall estimates it will receive approximately \$2.3 million in tax revenues annually. That revenue, Twitchell said, could be useful for securing new department equipment and personnel.

More money in city coffers could also mean more room for the union to negotiate salaries and benefits.

There are no assurances any of the revenue will go toward emergency services, as it is subject to the council's regular budget-making process.

Details of the project's impact on emergency services are outlined in its environmental impact report, which is available online at www.ci.arca-dia.ca.us.

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