

Mural planned for outside of former Press-Telegram building

By Karen Robes Meeks, Staff Writer

Posted: 11/03/2009 07:03:21 PM PST

http://www.presstelegram.com/ci_13704747

LONG BEACH - A mural may soon dress up the walls of the downtown building that once housed the Press-Telegram.

John and Michelle Molina, whose family runs Molina Healthcare and have been involved in the building project since 2004, have hired Dreams & Visions to help create a mural that would beautify the lot that includes the daily newspaper's former headquarters and the Meeker-Baker building at Sixth Street and Pine Avenue.

At a meeting Monday night with 1st District Councilman Robert Garcia, the couple introduced residents to the Dreams & Visions artists, who have been involved in creating several Long Beach murals - including the one at Ocean Boulevard and Pine Avenue and Wyland's Earth mural atop the Long Beach Arena.

The idea - spearheaded by Michelle Molina, who also heads **PeaceBuilders** as its CEO - is to fill the 36 or so wooden panels on the buildings with various positive images of the 1st District. The images, which would wrap around the block, would be tied together with messages of peace and peace-building.

Residents said they were pleased to see improvement plans for the site, which at times has been a target for graffiti. Some suggested to the Molinas that local artists be involved in the mural project. Garcia also said the former Blue Star restaurant that had been on the lot has been demolished and that new fencing will be up.

"I'm definitely in support of beautifying the property with a mural or some type of art," said Cynthia Ojeda, president of the North Pine Neighborhood Alliance. "We're really happy the Molina family is coming in and bringing this project instead of letting that property sit like that."

John Molina said he hopes to start on the mural in the coming weeks.

As for the building project itself, the Molinas said they have had to re-evaluate the project following the recession.

Sold in 2006, the paper's longtime home at 604 Pine was slated for a mixed-use condominium development. The original design featured two high-rise towers with up to 542 units above 37,000 square feet of commercial and office space and 1,186 parking spaces. The Planning Commission later approved a new design with one fewer tower, smaller units and reduced the size of the commercial space to 30,000 square feet and the number of parking spaces to 947.

Then, the recession hit and that project, at the time, could not be financed, John Molina said.

"So what we're looking at is, what we can put on the site that is financeable and adds to the community," he said, adding that there will be more community outreach once those plans come together.

"But in the meantime," he said, "the last thing that Pine Avenue needs is another, what I call, dead site. You see it up and down the street. An entire block that is deactivated and run down is not something residents and homeowners want to see. So we talked about what we can do on a short-term basis to engage the community."

karen.rob@presstelegram.com, 562-499-1303