

Pittsburg puts \$2.34 million toward New Mecca expansion

By Paul Burgarino

East County Times

Posted: 07/06/2009 10:44:15 PM PDT

This week, Pittsburg leaders agreed to dish out about \$2.34 million in redevelopment money to the landmark New Mecca Cafe for a planned expansion of the restaurant into the Martinetti building next door and renovation of the existing dining room.

Plans call for a modern kitchen, more indoor and outdoor seating, and bathrooms that are accessible to the disabled. The facade of the building also will be changed by adding tile and removing its lava rock. The cafe's catering operations will be located in a separate room.

New Mecca owners Guillermo "Bill" Muniz and his wife, Terry, say the project will preserve the restaurant's charm.

The deal includes swapping the Pittsburg-owned Martinetti property for property Muniz owns on the block — part of a long-term city plan to redevelop the block.

Architectural drawings are about 90 percent complete and being reviewed by various city departments, said project manager Courtland Holman. After that, construction documents will be created and the property will be transferred, he said, adding construction will start later this summer.

The project is expected to take about nine months to complete.

The agreement includes \$2.208 million toward forgivable construction loans and \$134,000 for facade improvements.

The entire facade loan will be forgiven if the New Mecca operates for five years and the entire rehabilitation loan will be forgiven if it operates for 10 years.

The renovated restaurant will help make downtown more vibrant, Councilman Ben Johnson said.

After the council's unanimous approval Monday, Muniz received a round of applause from those in attendance.

"I'm very happy," Muniz said. "I'm appreciative of everyone's support."

He added that he won't let the project affect the cafe's goal to "keep doing the best we can for customers every single day."

The New Mecca and Muniz have been Pittsburg fixtures since the mid-1960s. Customers say they return to the restaurant's timeworn booths and round red bar stools because of the memories and the food.

"There's no question that the Mecca is iconic; it brings people to Pittsburg," Mayor Nancy Parent said.

Several proposals to move the cafe were explored during the past few years.

Muniz and developer Albert Seeno III were preparing a deal in 2006 to put the Mecca in a new space on Railroad, with Seeno building townhomes and flats on the upper floors.

In 2007, Pittsburg decided that buildings on the block — including the cafe — would be retained in any development.

Over the years, Muniz has had several offers to move to Antioch, Concord, even Lake Tahoe. However, his heart is in Pittsburg, he said.

Reach Paul Burgarino at 925-779-7164 or pburgarino@bayareanewsgroup.com.