

Major alternative-fuels center planned City Heights to get \$17.5 million site

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A \$17.5 million center to promote the use of cars and trucks that run on natural gas and other alternative fuels will be built in City Heights.

The complex, approved yesterday by the San Diego City Council, will include an alternative-fuels education center, fueling islands and alternative-vehicle sales room, rental office and repair garage. It will be at the southwest corner of El Cajon Boulevard and 41st Street.

"It's an excellent example of a city/corporate partnership," said Councilwoman Toni Atkins, whose district includes the center.

The council approved the project, known as the Regional Transportation Center, as part of a community redevelopment program.

The primary developers of the 1.4-acre project are Pearson Ford and the San Diego Environmental Foundation Inc., said Steven Bimson, executive director of the nonprofit foundation.

Pearson Ford will operate the vehicle sales and service portion of the center in one building, Bimson said. The Environmental Foundation will run the education center in a nearby building, he said.

During the day, the facility will be open for field trips by an estimated 20,000 middle and high school students annually, Bimson said. "They will learn what's in the air they breathe," he said. "This will be the epicenter for air-quality education."

At night, the center will offer vocational training through Miramar College for those interested in working on alternative-fuel vehicles, said Mike Lewis, general manager of the project for Pearson Ford.

Funding for the center will come from about \$4 million in federal grants, a \$1.4 million Ford Foundation grant, \$260,000 from the California Energy Commission and \$250,000 from the Air Pollution Control District, Lewis said.

Six alternative fuels will be dispensed at the facility's fuel station: natural gas, propane, ethanol, bio-diesel fuel made from the grease used to cook french fries, low-sulfur diesel fuel and electricity, Lewis said.

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