



City of Arts & Innovation

News Release

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Riverside Takes Next Step As Culinary Hub of Inland Southern California

Chow Alley@Courthouse Piazza and Mess Hall on Market to bring more food options downtown

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – Riverside is stepping up its culinary game through the development of two new downtown dining destinations — Chow Alley@Courthouse Piazza and the Mess Hall on Market — that will dramatically increase the number of eating options in a downtown area that already has seen a food revolution in the past few years.

“Chow Alley and the Mess Hall will take our budding foodie culture in Riverside to a whole new level,” Riverside Mayor Rusty Bailey said. “Downtown Riverside already is a dining and entertainment destination in western Riverside County, and these projects will put us on the map across Southern California.”

Chow Alley@Courthouse Piazza calls for extending the successful Main Street pedestrian mall by closing Main between 10th and 11th streets and creating a piazza for outdoor dining, farmers’ markets, and entertainment in front of the historic Riverside County Courthouse. A dozen eateries operating out of modern cargo containers would fill a renovated outdoor space between the Courthouse and Market Street.

“Chow Alley@Courthouse Piazza is an intriguing concept to improve downtown Riverside while showcasing the County’s investment in our historic Courthouse,” Riverside County Supervisor John Tavaglione said. “I look forward to the Board exploring the issue further.”

Mess Hall on Market is a dining emporium featuring 14 outlets for high-end fare — meals, desserts, groceries and eclectic foodstuffs — within the renovated Fox Performing Arts Center property. The Mess Hall would be an opportunity to link the Fox, now operated at a higher level than ever by Live Nation, with another community asset, the Riverside City College Culinary Academy a block away.

The City Council on Tuesday (12/8) approved an Exclusive Right to Negotiate with Arteco Partners, developers of the successful Claremont Packing House development, to develop a long-term lease for the 14,000-square-foot Mess Hall space in Riverside. The agreement gives Arteco and the City a year to iron out details of the lease at the property at 3605 Market Street.

The City of Riverside would close Main Street to create Courthouse Piazza and is working with Riverside County to develop Chow Alley. The project would utilize two existing parking lots -- one owned by the City and the other by the County – to create an area for food vendors and public art between the west side of the Courthouse and Market Street.

The Riverside City Council approved a ground lease with the County on Tuesday (12/8) for the parking lots. The Riverside County Board of Supervisors is expected to take up the ground lease proposal in the coming days.

The Chow Alley project is expected to cost about \$1.2 million to demolish existing structures, replace the pavement and create decorative lighting. Lease revenue from the site is expected to generate \$56,700 per year, or about \$1.7 million over 30 years. The City would lease the County land for \$1 per year and then lease the land to a developer who would execute the project. The developer would be chosen through a Request for Proposals.

The Mess Hall on Market proposal would be further clarified through the Exclusive Right to Negotiate process with Arteco during the coming year. A final lease agreement, including financial impacts, would come back to the City Council for approval.

The projects enable the City of Riverside to play to the strengths of its existing downtown and maximize the value of its existing assets, including the historic Riverside County Courthouse, one of the most beautiful buildings in the state, City Manager John H. Russo said.

The City is enjoying great success along the Main Street pedestrian mall between City Hall on 10th Street and the Riverside Convention Center at 5th Street. These projects will allow some of that economic energy to spread south along Main Street, where vacant buildings are interspersed between successful eateries like The Salted Pig and W. Wolfskill.

“Courthouse Piazza will create a destination in the shadow of the breathtaking beauty of the historic Riverside County Courthouse,” Russo said. “From the weekly farmer’s markets to the very popular ice skating rink that operates during the Festival of Lights, there is an unlimited opportunity to develop this area into a community gathering spot.”

In order to deal with concerns about the loss of parking spaces from the closure of Main Street between 10th and 11th streets, the City will begin meeting with the County in January to discuss the potential development of a new parking garage near 11th and Market streets, Russo said.

The garage is envisioned as a joint-use facility that would be open to people serving on jury duty during the day and to patrons of Chow Alley in the evening hours.

The two projects also provide the City with an opportunity to further the success of the Grow Riverside local food movement. Grow Riverside is linking local farmers operating in the Arlington Heights Greenbelt and elsewhere to local restaurants, school districts and other food purveyors who are embracing a fresh, farm-to-fork approach to eating.

As more local restaurants open, the need for fresh, locally-produced ingredients grows as well. That creates an opportunity to increase local food production and “re-green” portions of the Greenbelt that are fallow, improving the value of properties in the area and fostering additional agricultural growth.

“Chow Alley@Courthouse Piazza and the Mess Hall on Market projects give us an opportunity to leverage our local culinary academy, our foodie culture and our local food movement,” Mayor Bailey said. “Riverside residents are asking for more unique dining options, and we are delivering.”