Police-station plans gain in City Heights
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City officials have moved closer to building a police station in City Heights and have started reviewing suggestions on how to reduce crime and energize business in San Diego’s aging urban core.

Both moves were expected but nonetheless were greeted enthusiastically this week by more than 200 people who attended a special City Council meeting Thursday in City Heights.

"I feel it's pretty inspiring to have the council out here tonight," said Jay Powell, director of the nonprofit City Heights Community Development Corporation, which designs economic strategies for the area.

"Momentum is building here" for programs aimed at combatting the ills of City Heights, Powell said after the meeting at Wilson Middle School.

The police station could be opened as early as September in an abandoned Vons supermarket at 43rd and Landis streets. The San Diego Police Department has been working to establish a station in the area, which has one of the city’s highest crime rates.

The law-enforcement facility would be the first phase of a larger plan pushed by Citylink, a San Diego-based investment corporation focused on urban renewal. The corporation is headed by William D. Jones, a former City Council member, with start-up capital from Sol Price, founder of The Price Club.

Citylink is developing plans for an expanded recreation center and a string of stores in a 7 1/2-block area bounded by University Avenue and 43rd, 45th and Landis streets.

The ambitious project, estimated at $65 million, will take at least four years and eventually could uproot several residents and businesses from the area, officials said. City officials are preparing to address the issue of relocation next month.

Some City Council members stressed during the meeting that they would like to erect police stations in their districts as well. George Stevens, who represents part of Logan Heights, reminded council members that he repeatedly has called for a police station near Imperial Avenue and 30th Street.

The City Heights project does not preclude a station being built in Stevens’ district, but city officials don't yet know how it will be funded, said City Manager Jack McGrory.
The City Council voted Thursday to allow Citylink to continue its planning and approved the floor plans for the City Heights police station.

News that a police station was likely to appear in City Heights was welcomed by some area merchants, some of whom complain that crime in the area scares away potential customers.

"I think for this area they need the police," said Lisa Nguyen from her delicatessen near University and Fairmount avenues. "The more the better."

Nguyen's business has been robbed twice during the three years it has been open. She stared at the busy street through steel bars covering the windows of her business and spoke of the drug sales she's witnessed.

"I think they need more police around here more often," she said.

In the other action taken by city officials Thursday night, the City Council addressed a long list of recommendations from area residents on how to combat crime and boost business. The recommendations stem from a brainstorming session in April in which 400 people from the neighborhood and elsewhere sought solutions to some of City Height's most burdensome problems.

The recommendations deal with several issues, including: enhanced economic development, reduced crime, improved educational programs and greater tolerance for the myriad ethnicities and languages across City Heights.

The city manager will review the recommendations and present the council with an implementation plan within the next few weeks.

Thursday's City Council meeting was one of a continuing series in which the legislators convene in various neighborhoods.

City Heights is one of San Diego's most ethnically diverse areas, home to about 70,000 people and dozens of languages. The neighborhood is roughly bounded by El Cajon Boulevard, Interstate 805 and Home and Euclid avenues.

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