

Wilshire Grand Gets Green Light from LA City Council



\$1.2 Billion Project Will Create 4,800 Craft Jobs with New Hotel Replacing Dated One

After two years of study, compromise, EIRs and negotiations, the Los Angeles City Council unanimously passed the \$1.2 billion Wilshire Grand redevelopment project March 29 before a chamber packed with hundreds of Building Trades members.

Jobs were on everyone's mind as the council discussed the pros and cons of the LED light displays planned for the hotel and adjacent office tower at Wilshire Boulevard and Figueroa Street. The existing hotel will be demolished in early 2012, and two new towers, the 45-story hotel and 65-story office building, will rise in its place starting in 2013.



Richard Slawson, center, joins Building Trades leaders to testify for Wilshire Grand.

The project will continue the revitalization of downtown with the first new office building to be constructed in LA in more than 22 years. The Building Trades were crucial in organizing support and negotiating a Project Labor Agreement to provide union construction jobs.

"The sports and entertainment district will be linked to the Wilshire Grand, making it a unique destination in this city," said Councilwoman Jan Perry. "Wilshire Grand is the key to our redevelopment. The old hotel is obsolete and LA lacks enough 4-star hotel rooms to attract conventions to the city."

Dozens of speakers testified on behalf of the rebuild, which is being developed by Thomas Properties and hotel owner Korean Air. It will create 4,800 union construction jobs and an additional 6,000 permanent union positions in the hotel and office buildings.

"The jobs created by this program are very significant," Jim Thomas, CEO of Thomas Properties, told Building Trades News.

Deals to Keep Jobs



Wayne Spencer, member of Ironworkers Local 416, urged the council to vote in favor of the measure, saying the project was much needed in these times of high unemployment in the trades. "This project will create thousands of jobs for myself and others in the Building Trades. We need it."

Tom Robles, also of Ironworkers 416, urged the council to vote yes because of all the jobs, tourists and money the project would bring. "It will give us work in the construction industry, but it will also offer

Building Trades members come out in force to support the Wilshire Grand rebuild.

thousands of good-paying jobs for LA County residents after it is built."

Maria Elena Durazo, LA County Federation Executive Secretary, said the new Wilshire Grand will put thousands of Angelenos back to work. "This is a model program," she said, negotiated with a PLA for the Building Trades and a collective bargaining agreement for hotel employees. "We should hold it up as a model for all employers to follow."

Rosa Rivera, a 21-year HERE Local 11 worker at Wilshire Grand, said she and other hotel workers were in full support of the redevelopment because of the unusually generous package the employers had offered them. The hotel will close at the end of 2011. "We have a very, very good employer. They will give us back our jobs with seniority, benefits, and salary and a special retirement package to employees who want to take it."

Bring on the Lights

In order to enable the developer to install vivid lighted signage on the building, the council approved a special sign district for the area. Some community members objected to the spread of bright lights at night in the neighborhood.

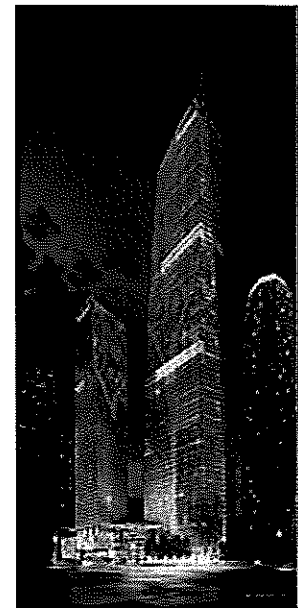
Developer Thomas said the lights add flair and financing. "Downtown LA is dead at night," he noted. "LA Live has been a big boon, but we need more. The signage issue helps us close the gap in financing in the project."

The LED lighting is sophisticated technology that is built into the structure, Thomas said. "It's not an aftermarket product tacked on. Anyone building today without using cutting-edge technology would be outdated immediately."

The LED signage spells more jobs for union electricians. "Wilshire Grand will provide 250 jobs to IBEW 11 members," said Kevin Norton, head of organizing. "We have catastrophic unemployment in the building trades right now. This project has the wholehearted support of the Building Trades."

Robbie Hunter, Building Trades Council Executive-Secretary, noted that the developer and supporters have worked for two years to make the rebuild a go. "This project has gone through full EIR process. We wouldn't support it otherwise. We're members of this community too. It took two years to meet the full requirements of the Planning Department. We've done that. Now it's time to pass this project and move forward."

Hunter and other advocates connected the rebirth of the Wilshire Grand with the proposed new Farmers Field stadium south of the hotel. "Wilshire Grand is a really important project that continues the positive effect of LA Live in revitalizing downtown," said Cassandra Zebisch, senior coordinator of communications for stadium developer AEG. "It's key to helping grow our tourism and convention business."



LED lighting will adorn the two towers.