

## Ardmore redevelopment project is back on track

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A controversial redevelopment in downtown Ardmore is back on track after the state restored \$10.5 million in grants that were previously pulled from the project.

Carl Dranoff, president of Dranoff Properties, said the funding was critical for a high-rise apartment and retail complex across from the Ardmore train station.

"Up until Friday, we didn't have a project," he said. "We kept plowing ahead during the whole 2014, advancing our plans and approvals on the hope that we would be ready to begin should we receive the grant."

He said they are prepared to break ground in December.

The governor's office had revoked a \$12 million grant in December 2013 because the project had been delayed and its "scope changed several times." Originally, the apartment-retail project was part of a renovation of the Ardmore train station; SEPTA is now redeveloping the station apart from Dranoff.

The new building, replacing the Cricket Avenue parking lot, will include street-level stores and restaurants, a three-story parking garage, and 121 upscale "transit-oriented" apartments. Dranoff says it will bring 300 jobs and \$100 million in economic activity to downtown Ardmore.

Critics, including at least three local civic associations, have argued that the development would be too dense for downtown. They also questioned the government subsidy - nearly 20 percent of the total project - for a commercial enterprise.

Teri Simon, a former planning commissioner who opposes the project, said the development is so dense and out of character with the neighborhood that "it's like taking King Kong's foot and putting it in Cinderella's slipper."

She said the project isn't providing enough public benefit to merit \$10.5 million in public investment.

"It's the kind of thing that makes people question their own government, especially when you see the Philadelphia School District and how much they need money," she said.

The \$10.5 million grant, from the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program, can be used only for the garage and retail portions of the property.

Jay Pagni, a spokesman for the governor, said staff received a lot of input "on both sides of this issue" over the last year. "It was necessary to review all of the concerns, affirmative or opposed, and determine what common ground could be arrived at."

Pagni said the developer had to prove that state funds would not be used for the residential portion and that the project "would lend itself to almost an immediate beginning of construction."

## **Ardmore redevelopment project is back on track**

philly.com, September 11, 2014

*page 2*

The price tag on the project, more than six years in the making, has risen from \$50 million to "closer to \$60 million," Dranoff said. "It's not unusual for projects to take multiple years, but this is probably the longest period it's taken me to get a project to a groundbreaking."

He said he expects the project to be complete in mid-2016.

*source: philly.com*