

February 22nd, 2011

Bremerton project will have a cinema

By [MARC STILES](#)

Journal Staff Reporter

Seefilm plans a 10-screen cineplex on top of a new garage in Bremerton. Lorax Partners will build apartments in the complex.

A Seattle cinema company is planning a 10-screen theater atop a new downtown Bremerton parking garage, where another developer plans to build up to 80 market-rate apartments.

Construction on both is expected to start this summer.

The cinema is the first project for Seefilm, which is headed by Seattle architect James Blissett of The Design Collective. It will have about 1,400 seats and a cafe.

Lorax Partners of Seattle will develop the housing and the city is building the 250-stall garage at Burwell Street and Park Avenue. Streetscape improvements are planned.

The overall project could cost about \$30 million, according to PJ Santos of Lorax.

Starting such an ambitious project in this economy seems risky, but Blissett says he's no risk-taker. He cites several factors: strong national cinema revenues, the expectation of rising home prices in Bremerton and the city's downtown renaissance.

"I think it's primed for a cinema," said Blissett.

Bremerton is home to the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, and has received public funds for redevelopment projects over the last decade. State and local funds are paying for the \$7.9 million parking garage, and Santos said the city received \$2.6 million in federal funds for the streetscape upgrades.

A leap of faith

"The city took a leap of faith [with the garage] because we did not promise them a cinema," said Santos, whose company is buying development pads on the garage from the city. "One leap of faith sometimes leads to great things."

The city, port and other entities have built a conference center, housing, a government center, parks and an expanded marina over the years, and those projects have led private developers to build new hotels and restaurants.

Seattle developer Ron Sher is turning an old bank into a bar and grill that is scheduled to open this spring. Tim Ryan Construction Inc. is the contractor. Sher also is planning to convert the former JC Penney store into housing and retail.

The new housing and cinema will attract more people, said Santos.

Hinthorne Mott Architects designed the parking garage and Serpanok Construction is the contractor. The city paid Lorax \$800,000 to work on developing the garage. Santos said construction will be done this summer.

Blissett's The Design Collective will design the cinema and Skyward Construction of Vancouver will be the contractor.

The Seattle architecture firm LMN is designing the streetscape, Santos said.

Santos declined to discuss who will design and build the apartments, but said they will have an "edgy, new urban" feel that hasn't been offered before in Bremerton.

Lorax will market the studio, one- and two-bedroom units to shipyard workers. Santos declined to provide target rents, but said, "We've done some pretty intensive research so we know where we need to be to make it work."

Lorax will sell some of the development pads to Seefilm and keep one for the housing. Santos declined to provide financial details, and city officials referred questions to Gary Sexton, Bremerton's special projects administrator, who was not available.

Santos said having the city build the garage is a big plus for the project. Another advantage is that the complex won't have a lot of retail. Small stores typically can't pay the rents required to cover the cost of new development.

Initially, the project had three small retail pads, but Seefilm wanted to expand its project so it will buy two pads. Lorax will market the remaining pad, which is about 1,000 square feet. Lorax is putting its own equity into the project, adding an investor partner and looking at options for debt financing. Seefilm is taking the same approach with its financing.

