Schools, Developers Bid for Pinecrest Properties

REAL ESTATE: Campuses find buyers but new use plans remain uncertain.
By CAROL LAWRENCE
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Educator: Evan Levy, head of Phoenix Ranch School’s parent company Chicago Investments, at former Pinecrest site in Simi Valley, which he bought for $7.5 million, Photo by David Sprague

“This is a big problem for charter schools — not finding real estate,” Bauer said. “It’s not affordable in Los Angeles, and it’s not readily available in areas that have the greatest need.”

Escalating prices

Granada Hills Charter bought the Northridge campus because its applications were outpacing space at its main campus on Zelzah Avenue. The high school paid about $5.6 million for Pinecrest’s 7-acre site, a “very good” price, Bauer said, for a property in hot demand.

“Within two months, I had been approached by multiple real estate developers to sell the property,” he said. “The lowest offer we received within two months was $8 million, and one of the last offers we received was up to $12 million.”

Granada didn’t flip the campus, Bauer said, because it’s not profit-driven and would still have to find another campus,

“There are not many high school options for students in the San Fernando Valley,” Bauer said. “That is very clearly due to the real estate crunch.”

The high school is also temporarily leasing out about half of the campus to an elementary charter school. Granada’s long-term plans for that portion is a kindergarten through eighth grade program,

“Families have been asking us for a middle or elementary school for years,” Bauer said.

Pinecrest’s Moorpark, Woodland Hills and Thousand Oaks’ properties are still owned by a Pinecrest-related entity. However, KB Home said in an application to Thousand Oaks that it is under contract to buy the 11.7 acre campus on Wilbur Road to build for-sale townhomes but needs a general plan amendment. The City Council, however, has directed KB Home to revise its plan to include some element of community value, such as senior and affordable housing.

New schools

Phoenix Ranch School and Camp in Simi Valley is also growing enrollment at its private preschool through eighth grade program and opened a second location at Pinecrest’s former property in the city.

Evan Levy, head of Phoenix Ranch’s owner, Chicago Investments in Encino, said he bought the facility because he has been increasing enrollment at Phoenix since buying it in 2014. The company bought Pinecrest’s 5.45 acre-campus at 4974 Cochran St. in May for $7.5 million.

After significant renovations, Levi opened a summer school program at the campus, and recently got licensed to care for infants there.

It’s now open for the current school year with 20 infants, preschool students and fifth through eighth graders, 60 to 80 of whom are former Pinecrest students. The two campuses have in total about 500 children enrolled, Levi said, while Pinecrest served about 300.

“There is a need for infants on that property,” Levi said, as well as at his other schools. Chicago Investments has three other schools with infant care programs in Encino, Woodland Hills and Manhattan Beach that average 35 to 36 infants each, “I could open up another infant building at each location and probably fill it.”

While the campus, many students and even some teachers are from Pinecrest — Phoenix Ranch hired about 20 — tuition is different.

Pinecrest tuition ranged from $9,500 to $10,750 a student for a school year, while Phoenix Ranch’s tuition is about 15 percent higher, Levi said.

“I felt we could enroll kids at the new campus, and as of today, we already exceeded our goal by 30 kids; and we’re still enrolling,” Levi said.