PHOTO BY AMY SYLVESTRI

The new $12-million Estudillo Avenue downtown parking garage is now open after nearly two years of construction.

By Amy Sylvestri

San Leandro Times

The downtown parking garage opened earlier this week and a ribbon cutting is scheduled for tomorrow, Nov. 16, at 8:30 a.m.

The $12-million garage, with entrances on Estudillo and Callan avenues, features free 2-hour parking for shoppers visiting downtown, two levels of long-term permit parking, and the fourth level is paid daily parking — which will be free until the end of the year and $2.50 per day after that. Those interested in purchasing monthly permits should call the city at 577-3372.

The city says having a large, centrally located parking garage keeps with plans for “transit orientated development” making it convenient for people to park once and walk around or take off from the downtown BART station.

The garage was built on the same site as the old 1970’s garage (which was demolished in 2010) and will have 384 spaces — the old garage had 215 spots.

The garage isn't just parking spaces, though — construction is underway for office space which will house the San Leandro Chamber of Commerce and a courtyard has been newly landscaped with palm trees and a new bus shelter has been installed. The city is also planning to install solar panels and add electric vehicle charging stations.

During the two years the garage was under construction, the city had replacement parking available on the former Lucky site at 1550 East 14th St.

That land will now by developed by the Innisfree Company as the "Village Marketplace," a shopping center that is tentatively planned to include a Fresh & Easy supermarket, a Chipolte Mexican fast food restaurant, a Peet's Coffee, an AT&T store and a sit-down restaurant to be named later — set to open as soon as 2013.

The city took a nearly $4-million loss in selling the land to Innisfree, but business development director Cynthia Battenberg has said they hope to recoup the money in the long run through property and sales tax on the new businesses and that the Village Marketplace project will reinvigorate downtown as a whole.