

COMMONS COMMENCES

Concrete changes appear in initial work on park where City Center stood

The sun was yet climbing up the eastern sky on Thursday when a long procession of concrete trucks lined up Downtown to pour the launch pad for a phoenix now rising atop the ashes of an albatross.

Particularly conspicuous among the dross of Columbus City Center was a sheet of plywood spray-painted with the word hole that alerted construction workers to the peril of tumbling into what once had been the amphitheater centerpiece of the former mall.

The trucks were there to pour a halfdozen, massive concrete slabs. "Because we are demolishing a 1-million-square-foot mall on top of an active garage, we had to go down into the garage and shore it up," said Mark Corna, president of Corna Kokosing Construction Co., the Westerville company that is transforming the mall site into a park to be called Columbus Commons.

The six slabs will require an ooze equal to the payload of 6,000 concrete trucks.

The changes most visible to Downtown pedestrians and motorists will be apparent first just west of the site. Town Street west of High is now a grassflanked thoroughfare whose cobblestone pavers were recycled from the adjacent bridge over the Scioto River that was torn down.

A 60-foot-wide hole in the crenellated High Street façade of the former Lazarus department store, where a bridge over the street connected to the mall, has been restored, with much of the faux-painting on the front completed by scholar-artists from Columbus College of Art & Design. An outdoor cafe is planned along the sidewalk fronting the Columbus landmark.

"By next month, you will see trees planted along the front," said Guy V. Worley, president and CEO of Columbus Downtown Development Corp. and Capitol South. "We're going to put a Michigan Avenue spin on it," he explained of efforts to mirror the feel of Chicago's Loop.

A tiered fountain will mark the west entrance to Columbus Commons and the eastern terminus of the promenade.

A crescent-shaped band shell will face south from the rear of the Ohio Theatre. "We're in discussions with CAPA (the Columbus Association for the Performing Arts) and the Columbus Symphony about having them play here," Worley said.

"We're thinking holiday concerts as well as spring and summer events," said Elise Yablonsky, a policy analyst with Worley's group. "Holiday lighting, maybe ice sculpting."

The park's developers suggest that it will be an elegant tray for a delectable sampling of canapes to suit most any taste — yoga classes to kickboxing instruction, a classic children's carousel in the park to classic car shows on the roof of the parking garage to the south, athletic leagues hosting kickball and flag football.

In addition to creating space for an outdoor "reading room" and a farmers' market, the developers suggest that they hope to ally with such organizations as the science museum COSI Columbus to present samplings of permanent exhibits.

Corna, standing at the center of what will be Columbus Commons, said Thursday, "We believe that the core here will be just as successful as the Arena District one day."

It almost makes one wonder whether anyone ever stood in the middle of the prison yard of the now-demolished Ohio Penitentiary and dared to venture that the area would one day rival Columbus City Center.

As for City Center, the only recent expression of loss Worley's office has fielded was from a woman who telephoned to say she had purchased a bathing suit at

Jacobson's department store that she apparently lost somewhere in the mall.
Also, if you find a green umbrella ...
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COURTNEY HERGESHEIMER DISPATCH PHOTOS
A panoramic view of the construction at Columbus Commons park Downtown was created by "stitching" together several photos with computer software.



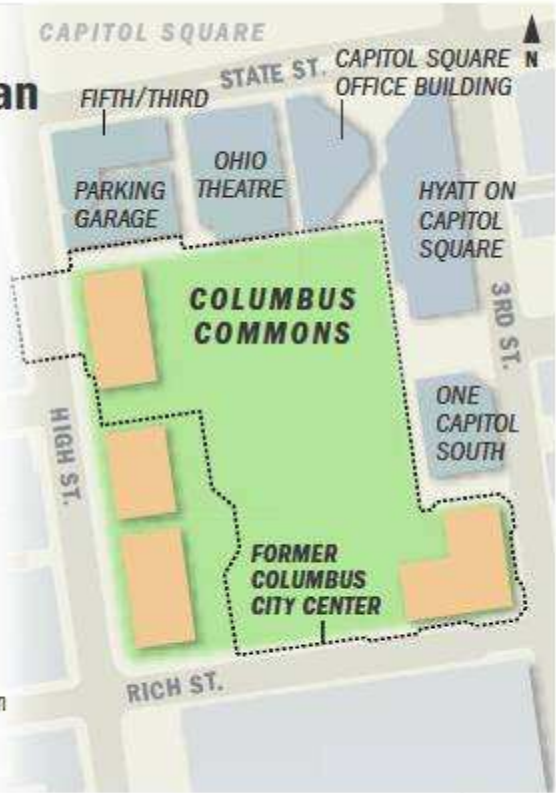
Guy Worley, president and CEO of Columbus Downtown Development Corp., with contractor Mark Corna behind him, points out features at the site.

Columbus Commons plan

- Proposed development
- Nearby buildings

City Center is demolished and work has begun on a 9-acre park. Plans call for eventually developing offices, homes, restaurants and shops, but at least 6 acres will remain green space.

Source: Columbus Downtown Development Corp.



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A rendering of Columbus Commons looks northwest over Rich Street and the future park.