

Green efforts begin to transform former City Center site

** Officials said nearly 89 million pounds of materials from the demolition effort have been recycled.*

By **GARTH BISHOP**

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It doesn't look like much now, but workers are laying the foundations -- literally -- for the mixed-use development that will become Columbus Commons.

It's being constructed at the former site of the City Center Mall in downtown Columbus. The mall was purchased by the city, closed and knocked down and cleared away to make way for the new project.

All that remains of the mall is the parking garage.

"We began demolition of the mall in October of 2009," said Guy Worley, CEO of project developer Capitol South as well as the Columbus Downtown Development Corporation. "Now, the mall has been completely removed."

When completed, Columbus Commons will include retail space, restaurants, residential units and office space. But the first element expected to be completed is the nine-acre park at its center.

A conservation easement -- to ensure the center portion of the site will remain a park -- was procured recently.

Workers are about halfway finished building a concrete transfer slab where the mall's aboveground portions once stood, in order to protect an underground parking garage.

"That will continue until this summer, and then we'll start building the park as soon as the transition slab is finished," said Worley.

Elements of the park will begin to appear in late summer and early fall, Worley said. After seasonal plantings in early spring, the park should open by the end of April 2011.

Other parts of Columbus Commons will fill in during the next five to 10 years, Worley said, though the park will continue to occupy six acres in the middle.



SNP photo by Garth Bishop

Here is a view of the site where City Center once was located, shot looking north from the roof of the nearby parking garage.

Officials hope the central park will serve as a catalyst for development in the area, just as McFerson Commons was a catalyst for development in the early days of the Arena District, Worley said.

To keep the park active, officials are looking into a wide variety of amenities and programming options.

"We've spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to program this park and make it a very useful amenity for Downtown and for the region as a whole," said Worley.

Two outdoor cafes, a carousel, an outdoor reading area offering magazines and books and even a space for entertainment are among the plans being considered.

"We'd like to have concerts both large-scale ... and lunchtime," said Amy Taylor, chief operating officer for CDDC.

Musical performances, plays, previews of major local productions such as BalletMet's Nutcracker and holiday light tours are just a few of the things park organizers would like to pursue, Taylor said.

Meanwhile, the remnants of City Center are not just taking up landfill space -- more than 81 percent of the materials from the demolished mall have been recycled, Taylor said.

The mall left about 109 million pounds of debris, and about 89 million pounds have been recycled -- including almost 18,000 fluorescent light bulbs and 930 gallons of hydraulic oil for elevators.