

# Mall set to come down in summer

## *Council clears Capitol South plan to demolish City Center*

By Robert Vitale  
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

A month shy of its 20th birthday, Columbus City Center will come down starting in July.

Although they couldn't score federal economic-stimulus money for demolition, officials of the nonprofit development agency that owns the shuttered Downtown mall said yesterday that they'll move forward this summer with plans to tear it down.

The City Council gave the Capitol South Urban Redevelopment Corp. permission last night to refinance existing loans on City Center parking garages, borrow additional money and use funds earmarked for Downtown housing projects to pay for the work.

Capitol South announced a plan in February to replace the failed mall with Columbus Commons, which will open as a 9-acre park in late 2010 and evolve over the next decade into a new retail center that also has homes and office space.

Demolition and development of the park will cost \$15 million to \$20 million, according to Amy Taylor, Capitol South's chief operating officer. The long-term Columbus Commons plan has been estimated at \$165 million.

The development agency will seek federal and state grants to cover some of the cost, Taylor said. It will seek corporate help as well.

City Council members emphasized, though, where funding won't come from.

"No — I'm underlining — no city tax dollars will be used in this project," said Councilwoman Charleta B. Tavares.

Columbus owns the land where City Center sits, between High and 3rd streets south of the Statehouse. Capitol South has owned the mall since 2007, after suing for control when its then-operators missed a rent payment.

Taylor said the parking garage beneath City Center will stay open while the mall is torn down. Demolition will be piece by piece, not a big-bang implosion, she said.

Capitol South is working out terms of its new mortgage, including the amount, with Huntington National Bank, Taylor said. Council approval was a legal step required to move forward.

In other business last night, council members approved the city's participation in the Big Darby Accord, a regional pact to guide development along the scenic Big Darby Creek in western Franklin County.

The Franklin County commissioners approved the agreement last week.

As part of the accord, Columbus will provide sewer and water service to parts of Prairie Township without requiring residents to be annexed into the city. It's an exception to long-standing city policy.

Council members also appointed a new city treasurer to replace Thomas Isaacs, who retired from the unelected post late last year after more than 13 years.

Deborah Klie has been deputy treasurer since 2007 and served before that as director of finance and administration for the Franklin County Municipal Court.

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