

City Center demolition would be piece by piece

By Mark Ferenchik
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The biggest challenge in tearing down Columbus City Center is dealing with the underground parking, a demolition specialist said.

The two garages — a main two-level with 900 spaces and a 100-space level under the old Max & Erma's restaurant — are staying. That means crews won't be able to move the heaviest equipment onto the site to simply knock down the structure, said Terry Anderson, whose Washington, D.C.-area company specializes in demolishing malls and urban buildings.

Cranes and other equipment would have to be brought in to carefully dismantle the mall piece by piece, said Anderson, executive vice president of Wrecking Corp. of America.

"This is not sending a bunch of guys loose with cutting torches," Anderson said. "You've got to engineer this."

Local demolition contractor David Loewendick said a job like this takes specialized equipment and ingenuity.

The best way to go about it? "Carefully," said Loewendick, who did a preliminary study for the mall's owner, the city-related nonprofit Capitol South Urban Redevelopment Corp., to get an idea on the scope of the demolition.

Anderson said crews will need to shore up the slab between the mall and the garage below before moving in equipment, although Loewendick said he doesn't know whether that would be necessary.

Officials have not determined whether to keep the garages open during demolition, and they hope they won't have to close streets.

Before work begins, Capitol South plans to hold a liquidation sale open to the public. It will include mall fixtures, furniture and jewelry cases, said Amy Taylor, the group's chief operating officer. A date for the sale hasn't been set.

Then the demolition crew would strip the mall of materials to recycle, such as steel, aluminum and concrete.

They also must take steps to protect the buildings close to the mall, which include the Hyatt on Capitol Square, the Ohio Theatre and two high-rise office buildings along State Street.

"You have to go in and surgically separate the structures," Loewendick said.

When Colvin Gravel removed the glass atrium from the old COSI Columbus building on E. Broad Street, workers cut away parts by hand so they wouldn't damage the building, President Dan Colvin said.

Placing a seismic monitor in the Ohio Theatre, a national historic landmark, wouldn't hurt either, Anderson said.

Anderson's company recently demolished the 1.2 million-square-foot Waterfront Mall in Washington, D.C., sandwiched between two 12-story office buildings and adjacent to a grocery store. That cost between \$6 million and \$7 million. But he didn't have to deal with underground parking.

Capitol South Chief Executive Guy Worley has estimated that demolishing City Center will cost \$17 million.

Columbus Mayor Michael B. Coleman is lobbying for \$32 million in federal stimulus money to pay for the demolition and to develop a new park and surrounding projects on the site.

Last month, Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland appointed Ronald B. Richard, chief executive of the Cleveland Foundation, to be his "infrastructure czar." Richard is leading the process to position Ohio projects for stimulus funding.

Anderson, with headquarters across the river from the nation's capital, hadn't heard of anyone asking for stimulus money to pay for a mall demolition.

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