

## ROOM FOR PARK, HOUSING, STORES

# Razing of City Center approved

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Columbus City Center will come down, starting as early as next month, after Columbus' Downtown Commission approved the mall's demolition in a meeting yesterday.

The move clears the way for a demolition permit to be issued to Capitol South Community Urban Redevelopment Corp. Work is expected to begin in late September or early October, with the majority of the site's underground parking spaces remaining open during the razing.

The demolition is expected to cost \$15 million to \$20 million, most of it private funds. Capitol South, which controls the city-owned mall, announced its intention in February to demolish City Center to make way, initially, for a park called Columbus Commons.

Within a few years, the group hopes to attract private investment for a mixed-use development on the mall site to include shops and housing along High Street and an office building at Rich and 3rd streets, where the former Marshall Field's store stands.

Before the vote, two commission members questioned the need to demolish the Marshall Field's building. Member Robert Loversidge contended that the plans call for a building of the same shape and size on the site, and he asked why the former department store couldn't be reused.

Mark Corna of Corna Kokosing and Curt Moody of Moody-Nolan, who are part of the design/build team for the project, said extensive study and consultation with developers determined that reusing the existing building would be costly and impractical.

The commission did not give the go-ahead for new structural elements such as an entryway to the underground garage and a proposed mural on the back of the Ohio Theatre, where a removable bandshell is planned. The commission said it will consider those items after final designs are presented.

In approving City Center's demolition, Commission Chairman Stephen Wittmann commented that the group normally frowns on the destruction of Downtown buildings, but in this case, it is willing to take a "leap of faith."

"It makes me kind of gag to think of tearing down a million square feet of space that's, what, 20 years old?" Wittmann said. But, after consideration of the plan and the alternative of having a huge vacant building there instead, "I've come around," he said.

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