

Greening Downtown

Many lament loss of City

Center, but new park will be a Columbus jewel

The Columbus Downtown Commission's vote Tuesday approving demolition of the former City Center mall is a milestone in the evolution of Downtown as an inviting place to work, live and play.

Capitol South Community Urban Redevelopment Corp., which controls the mall, is privately raising the \$15 million to \$20 million needed to tear down the 20-year-old complex and replace it with green space long needed in the center of town.

Eventually, plans call for moderately priced apartments, offices and stores surrounding the site, but a 6-acre park will remain in the center.

Some people understandably lament tearing down a structurally sound building so young, but years of failed efforts to redevelop the mall have shown that it was a concept whose time has passed.

Downtown boosters also know that Columbus' geographic center long has lacked green space; the Statehouse lawn has been about the only place to picnic or enjoy an expanse of green. Recent improvements such as McPherson Commons in the Arena District, graced by the old Union Station arch and frequented by kickball players, dog walkers, joggers and new Downtown dwellers, show that parks bring life and vitality to cities just as they do to suburban neighborhoods.

That's obvious to people who know great cities, even if not to those naysayers who suggest that Columbus Commons, as the park and eventual other development is being called, will attract only vagrants and crime.

On the contrary, providing a safe, well-designed space for people to relax and gather will attract strong community use and enjoyment that will make it unwelcoming to vagrants and criminals. Just check out Schiller and Goodale parks on any fair-weather evening to see what a popular park can do for a community.

Using the space as parkland also allows Columbus Commons to keep the underground parking garage that served City Center. Parking is a valuable amenity in any Downtown development; spaces underground, where they don't spoil the view or create an asphalt desert, are even more valuable.

Razing city center is painful, but it's the necessary start to creating what could become Columbus' own version of Central Park.