

Downtown park to get a big boost

By Marla Matzer Rose
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Columbus Commons, the Downtown park that will take the place of Columbus City Center, is about to receive a \$2 million assist from Franklin County Metro Parks.

Metro Parks is set to approve the investment this afternoon. It will represent about 10 percent of the park's projected cost.

Demolition of City Center has begun, with construction of the park expected to be completed in December 2010. The project is being overseen by the nonprofit Capitol South Community Urban Redevelopment Corp. on behalf of the city.

Metro Parks is funded mainly through a 10-year Franklin County property tax. Voters approved a 0.75-mill levy for the organization in May.

The money probably will be funneled to Capitol South as reimbursement for park-building expenses, said John O'Meara, Metro Parks executive director. He said the \$2 million outlay won't affect Metro Parks' ability to fund its other projects and won't be an ongoing expense since Capitol South will be charged with managing the park for the city.

O'Meara said Columbus Commons will create a "good synergy" with the recently opened Scioto Audubon Metro Park, on which Metro Parks spent \$11 million.

"Within a few years, I think these areas will really work together to enhance the reputation of Downtown parks in Columbus," O'Meara said. "We think this will make Downtown a more livable place, which in turn can make it a more attractive place to locate and help protect more (environmentally) sensitive places elsewhere."

"We're delighted that Metro Parks is partnering with Capitol South on Columbus Commons," said Guy Worley, chief executive of Capitol South. "This funding is critical to making the park a premier destination for all of Franklin County."

With the \$2 million addition, \$17 million in funding will have been secured for the estimated \$20 million project to demolish City Center and build the park. Federal stimulus funds for the project were sought but did not come through. The \$15 million is coming from Capitol South's funding sources, which include parking and rent revenue on the City Center parking garage and the former Lazarus building across High Street.

Worley said the organization continues to "seek other partners" to fund the project and programming in the park once it is open.

In August, it was announced that the Columbus Association for the Performing Arts will handle programming for the park starting in summer 2011.

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