



Coral signs on to do Cedar Center project

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By Jeff Piorkowski

SOUTH EUCLID Mayor Georgine Welo and City Council rejoiced Monday as a long wait came to an end.

Council unanimously approved a development agreement with Cleveland's Coral Co. to build the Cedar Center shopping strip on the north side of Cedar Road, at Warrensville Center Road.

Plans call for more than just shopping, however. The new Cedar Center will include dwellings, a parking garage and greenspace suitable for outdoor gatherings.

"It was all done for you, the residents," Welo said after council approved the deal.

Coral president Peter Rubin said a long period of work had paid off. Rubin, whose company owns and operates the recently refurbished (at \$30 million) Cedar Center strip in University Heights, spoke of trying to buy, without city assistance, the South Euclid Cedar Center beginning in 1999.

"We had significant title problems, so that didn't work out," Rubin said.

Now things are different as Coral will pay the city \$17 million (the cost South Euclid paid in acquiring Cedar Center properties) and embark on a project Rubin said will cost "at least \$40 million."

The 12-acre South Euclid Cedar Center is about 20 percent larger than its sister shopping center across the street.

"We're thrilled that we can finally move ahead with this project," Rubin said.

He said plans call for the new Cedar Center to include 120,000 square feet of retail space, 75 residential units and a parking garage. Its architecture, Rubin said, won't mirror that of University Heights' Cedar Center (where Coral's office is located), but will be "sympathetic to it.

"The most important part of this is the approach we're taking to this development and making it a regional attraction.

"We're going to market it with Cedar Center in University Heights and University Square (at the southeast corner of Cedar and Warrensville Center and owned by Inland Real Estate) and make it the only place in the region where you can live and walk to a Macy's and a Target, which they have at University Square, or a Whole Foods, like we have in University Heights, and whatever we bring in to South Euclid. That marketing approach should help us bring in some high quality stores to South Euclid."

Of the project finally coming to fruition after years of hopes and work, Welo said, "This is political will. This is actually public service."

Rubin said there should be a sign posted within the next week at the site telling of the project's coming. He said demolition probably wouldn't start until the middle of 2008.

"I believe this is the most important legislation I've voted on since I've been on council (since 1999)," said councilwoman at-large Sunny Simon. "It's progressive and speaks to the tenacity of our vision."

The city has been engaged in various forms of work in the last couple of years to get the project done, including purchasing properties and going to court to fight through legal entanglements.

"Redeveloping our urban centers is one of the most challenging and important issues facing our region's inner-ring suburbs," said Director of Community Services Keith Benjamin. "Peter Rubin and the Coral Co. are the right developers for this project.

This summer, an exclusivity contract with developers Orion Capital, of Little Rock, Ark., South Euclid's initial choice, expired. Welo said there was no shortage of developers willing to take Orion's place.

"There were nine developers and we went with the local boy," Welo said. "On Saturday afternoon I got a call at home from another developer in Chicago who wanted to do this project."

Much needs to be done before new stores and homes start springing up.

"We're now in phase two where we have to do environmental cleanup," Welo said. "We're applying for a \$1 million grant/loan this year and an \$800,000 grant next year.

"And, we have to meet with the neighbors in that area to explain what we're doing, and work with the Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District to come up with a TIF (tax increment financing) agreement."

TIF involves using tax gains expected to be derived from a new development to pay, in advance, for the development. Schools are made part of the agreement because they lose initial tax money.

The South Euclid portion of Cedar Center and its surrounding neighborhood is part of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights school district.

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