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Retail complex proposed for Solon

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Solon- Make way for another chic shopping center on Cleveland's East Side, this time a \$500 million complex just off Ohio 422.

A University Heights developer proposes more than 2 million square feet that will give the suburb a downtown gathering spot, with 90 acres of shops, restaurants, condos, offices and college classrooms along SOM Center Road.

Businesses could open by 2011, challenging upscale retail magnets like Legacy Village in Lyndhurst and First & Main in Hudson.

"This is the sort of shot in the arm that we have been looking for in our community in terms of retail for quite a number of years," Mayor Kevin Patton said Friday. "This will be a big step in the right direction."

Over the past six months, the Coral Co., which owns Shaker Square and is building homes in Westlake's Crocker Park, has negotiated quietly with owners in the 90-acre tract.

So far, it has made deals for 40-some acres of dated strip malls and office buildings, located between Bainbridge and Solon roads, Coral President Peter Rubin said.

A portion of that is owned by developer Scott Wolstein, known for plans to remake the Flats and a proposal to bring major league soccer to Macedonia.

Coral is now working to buy more than 50 homes off Bainbridge Road, some of which are already under contract. Rubin won't build around someone's house, though, instead fashioning the project around the land he can buy.

He talks passionately of a new center for Solon, "a slice of downtown Chicago, a manageable but urban collection of restaurants, shops, condos over shops, focused around a large public park."

"When you look at Solon, it's a phenomenal place," he said, "but what it lacks is a central meeting place."

Hence the development's name, tentatively, Central Parc. First, though, residents must vote to rezone the site, most likely on the March ballot.

And some residents dislike the idea.

"It's ruined my day, to say the least," said Barry Leubitz of quiet Sharondale Drive, where residents are asked to sell.

Leubitz is finishing remodeling his 1960s ranch to allow his wife, who uses a wheelchair, to move more freely. "I don't like the idea of being displaced," he said.

Neighbor Linda Reed, however, believes the center would benefit the whole city.

"For Solon to maintain its standing nationally as one of the top 10 places to live and work, it needs the renovation," said Reed, who has lived in Solon since 1979.

"The facelift is very, very necessary."

A downtown-esque development worked in Westlake, where Crocker Park opened three years ago.

"It's been fantastic," said Will Krause, Westlake's assistant planning director. "It's created a downtown for the city that's we've never really had before."

Patton hopes Central Parc will play the same role in Solon. But, he cautioned, other developers have approached the city about similar-style centers.

"In the end," he said, "it's the council's challenge to determine which projects they feel are in the best interests of the community."

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