

RICHMOND REGISTER

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Work on Richmond Centre begins in earnest

Bill Robinson

Register News Writer

— Drilling machines bored into limestone bedrock and bulldozers plowed through the Bluegrass topsoil Wednesday preparing sites for the Shops at Richmond Centre, as Britt Goodson of Carolina Holdings Inc. gave the Richmond Rotary Club an update on the 120-acre development.

“We got started a bit late, in July rather than June, but we should still have most stores open by October or early November 2008,” he told the Rotarians and guests during their weekly luncheon at Galaxy Bowling Center, just a few blocks from Richmond Centre.

The Meijer supermarket, one of three anchors, will not open until April 2009, because the company opens stores only in the spring.

The other major anchors in Richmond Centre, being built along Barnes Mill Road between Interstate 75 and Goggins Lanes, include two department stores — JCPenney and Belk — as well as Home Depot. Cinemark, which is planning a 12-screen movie complex, and Goody’s will be moving from the Richmond Mall to Richmond Centre along with JCPenney.

At 85,300 square feet, the JCPenney in Richmond Centre will be more than two and a half times the size of the store in the Richmond Mall. The Richmond store will be one of the first to use JCPenney’s new prototype design, Goodson said. The Belk store will be 73,800 square feet.

At least 10 out parcels in Richmond Centre have been allocated for casual dining restaurants. When asked by a Rotarian, Goodson said allowing Sunday drink sales would help attract restaurants to the development. “All casual dining restaurants are sensitive to this issue,” he said.

Restaurants such as The Olive Garden and Logan’s — both possibilities for Richmond Centre — earn from 16 to 28 percent of their income from drinks sales, Goodson said. “Sunday dining is a big part of their business, so Sunday drink sales may be a factor in decisions to locate here.”

On Tuesday, the Richmond City Commission will vote on a proposed ordinance that would allow Sunday drinks sales in restaurants that seat at 100 or more and draw at least 50 of their revenue from the sale of food. A similar proposal was rejected 5-0 in February.

“We knew the situation here when we began planning for Richmond Centre, and we try to stay out of local decision making,” Goodson said. “The job of attracting restaurants is made easier when Sunday drinks sales are available, however.” Richmond is not a major metropolitan area, “So we can use all the help we can get in bring national chain restaurants.”

Carolina Holdings’ marketing partner, Crosland LLC of Charlotte, N.C., is in negotiations with several national chains that soon will be making decisions about other tenants in Richmond Centre. “We may have some announcements by late August or early September,” he said.

“We’re working on getting a major consumer electrics store, but we will have other apparel stores, a bath and linen store, a craft store and a bookstore,” he said.

The bookstore and cinema complex will anchor two sides of a “pedestrian friendly Town Centre” that will include cafés with outdoor seating and boutiques.

Carolina Holdings often is asked whether Target will be in Richmond Centre, but Goodson said the location may not meet that retailer’s market criteria. “It’s still on the back burner, however.”

Richmond Centre will exceed the city of Richmond’s requirements for trees and other greenspace, Goodson said. “We use Merritt Construction, which has the landscaping contract for the Augusta National golf course, home of The Masters tournament. They will be planting some 1,500 new trees.”

An estimated 1.3 million cubic yards of rock and soil will be moved for site preparation. Blasting of rock started more than a week ago, but blasting done according to professional standards should prevent damage to surrounding structures, Goodson said.

The 15-acre northern tip of the development that arcs from Goggins Lane along Barnes Mill Road and then up along the interstate will be developed later. It will likely include offices and a hotel.

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet is requiring the developer to widen Barnes Mill out to Goggins Lane instead of just to Frankie Drive, Goodson said. Traffic signals to be installed at Richmond Centre's two main entrances, at Amberly Way and Frankie Drive, will be synchronized with the existing lights at Exit 87 and at Goggins Lane. These traffic signals should cause breaks in traffic flow that will allow easier access than now available for vehicles entering Barnes Mill Road from Hampton Way and Idylwild Drive.

Walkways will be included for pedestrian access from the hotels and residences across Barnes Mill Road.

Goodson thanked Richmond city officials for their cooperation in getting the project going. "They have made my job easy here," he said.

Carolina Holdings chose Richmond because, "It has a lot going on, but appeared to be underserved in the retail area," Goodson said. "There is no major retail center between Lexington and Knoxville."

The Shops at Richmond Centre seeks to draw customers from the region that extends from Richmond out to Lancaster on the west and Beattyville on the east down to Barbourville and Corbin. "Nearly 220,000 people live in the area, many of who already drive to Lexington for shopping," Goodson said. "We hope to cut 50 miles out of their drive for quality shopping and entertainment."

Bill Robinson can be reached at brobinson@richmondregister.com or 623-1669, Ext. 267.

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