

Mall slated for \$100m upgrade

Kim Westad

Times Colonist

Friday, May 19, 2006

A \$100-million redevelopment of the Town and Country Shopping Centre will see the 1960s strip mall in Saanich replaced with a centre almost triple in size.

Geoff Nagle, director of development for Western Canada with Morguard Investments Ltd., hopes the project will start in October if a development permit is approved. The first stores are slated to open two years after work begins, with the entire centre complete by the third year. Wal-Mart, the centre's largest tenant, would remain open during construction and is confirmed as an anchor tenant in the upgraded project.



CREDIT: Courtesy Morguard Investments Ltd.

An artist's rendering shows the 'Main Street' concept envisioned for the Town and Country Shopping Centre site.

Negotiations are ongoing with Fairway Market. The locally owned grocery store is "strongly interested" in being an anchor tenant, Nagle said. Morguard is in discussion with other anchor stores, but is not yet disclosing which ones.

Shoppers Drug Mart would also remain open at a temporary on-site location so prescriptions can be filled during construction.

Discussions are ongoing with other tenants. Many would have to relocate during construction, such as Anna's Hair Design. Manager Anthony Porco said the salon is moving to the Save-On-Foods Plaza, but will return when the new centre is complete.

Plans call for an open-air main street, mostly underground parking, and residential units with easy access to nearby walking and cycling trails.

"It's definitely a change from retail as the south Island currently knows it," Nagle said. Morguard, on behalf of Pensionfund Realty Ltd., has been working on the project for 21/2 years.

The development doesn't need rezoning -- the 18.8-acre site is already zoned for a mix of residential and business use -- but needs a development permit, which the company applied for this week.

Saanich Mayor Frank Leonard said the site is appropriate for redevelopment, particularly since it's so well located. It's the nexus of two major intersections at Douglas and Blanshard Streets, as well as near the Galloping Goose and the anticipated light rail transit line on Douglas Street.

When Town and Country was built in 1961 on land that used to house Saanich Municipal Hall, it was thought to be ahead of its time with its design and size. "It was unique 40 years ago, and it's about to be ahead of the curve again," said Leonard.

The proposed 603,000-square-foot centre will look different from the usual mall, Nagle said. Much of the parking -- a total of 2,800 spaces -- will be in multiple underground layers, and built into the bank along Saanich Road.

The mall will be an open-air "main street" concept, with three-storey buildings. The first two floors would be retail, including a "fashion street" and the third floor for offices.

The greater retail density means that less land has to be used. If the centre were built in the strip-mall style, it would need 45 acres for a development of this size, including parking, Nagle said.

The first phase of 8 1/2 months will see construction of underground parking at the south end of the site. Existing buildings at the north end up to the Wal-Mart entrance would

also be demolished. The second phase of 14 1/2 months would see construction of a new Wal-Mart and half of the fashion street.

© Times Colonist (Victoria) 2006