



## Seven Year Switch

It's been seven years since St. Charles first started talking about re-development in 2000, and eight months since the city broke ground on its downtown project.

More than \$100 million has been allocated to the plan, which will turn the city's 1st Street area into a haven of shops and restaurants flanked by attractive walkways, fine landscaping and upscale residential buildings.

"It's huge...the largest, and perhaps most aggressive, re-development project in the area," said David Richards, executive director of the Downtown St. Charles Partnership.

And its purpose is to build character in the district, which extends south off of the city's Main Street shopping and commercial area (Route 64). Encompassing more than seven acres just south of Main, the new plan will boast 136,000 square-feet of first floor retail space, and 115,000 square-feet of office space for sale or lease.

Residential space will feature 79 condos and 16 apartments; an array of parking options will offer nearly 1,000 spots, both indoor and on the street.

The tallest building in construction will be five stories.

The majority of commercial space is broken up into units of about 1,000 square-feet, which would most likely lead to small, boutique-style shops and stores, similar to the downtown retail district in neighboring Geneva.

There, a thoroughfare of shopping and restaurants on Rt. 38 hedges south down Third Street, adding another half mile of shopping and entertainment to the downtown area. The shopping district is a popular destination for both area residents and traveling shoppers.

Already in place on St. Charles Main Street are such historic structures as the recently renovated Hotel Baker and the Arcada Theater, which is closed to regular cinema but can be utilized for a variety of live performances and special events.

"The redevelopment of First Street should not be seen as a chance to create something entirely new. Rather, the character of downtown and the river valley should shape and inform new development along First Street, creating the feeling of a natural extension," the plan states.

With St. Charles itself located along one of the more picturesque areas of the Fox River, the redevelopment plan embraces the Fox as an amenity and an attraction in the community. The connection between the riverfront and development along First Street is planned to be seamless.

As such, great consideration was taken in determining things such as roof heights, sight lines, and entryways to the river from the main streets. A large pedestrian walkway is planned.

This project includes significant bridge and sewer repair, road reconstruction and demolition of many old residential structures, most recently housing small businesses.

To date, work crews have finished much of the underground repairs and construction is now apparent on the surface. The city's 80-year-old grocer, The Blue Goose, broke ground for a new store in April, turning over its former location to the redevelopment project. Other businesses once housed in some of the historic homes along First Street will need to find new locations, as those buildings have been razed or are scheduled for demolition.

Now in the second phase of the project, construction is set to begin in June on a 54,000-square-foot retail and office building and a 433-space parking deck, to be completed by May 2008.

"The permits for the parking deck and the Plaza buildings are in process right now," said Richards. "Staff review and approval could take upward of 30-60 days, after which construction can begin. We hope to break ground in June."

Posted on Wednesday, May 09, 2007 (Archive on Wednesday, May 16, 2007)

Posted by mthomton Contributed by mthomton