

Two malls may get mixed-use makeovers

Sources: Talks center on Metro North, Metcalf South

BY JIM DAVIS | STAFF WRITER

Two of the Kansas City area's largest shopping centers, Metro North and Metcalf South, are being readied for mixed-use repositionings.

Interests tied to Sherman Driesuszun and the family of the late Frank Morgan, the malls' owners, are talking to Alberta Development Partners LLC in suburban Denver about a joint venture arrangement.

The prospective partners declined to comment on their negotiations, which were confirmed by two sources who didn't want to be named because they aren't involved in the talks.

The former Mission Center mall, considerably smaller than either Metro North or Metcalf South, is undergoing a \$380 million conversion to mixed use.

Metro North and Metcalf South, both pockmarked by vacant storefronts, are ripe for redevelopment.

Pete Fullerton, executive director of the Platte County Economic Development Council, said Metro North's disinvestment also is depressing the rest of the Northland. Metro North, whose 1.2 million square feet of stores rank No. 2 on the Kansas City Business Journal's list of the Top 25 Area Shopping Centers, hasn't replaced an anchor, a Montgomery Ward & Co. store that closed in 2001 after the department store operator filed for bankruptcy.

Metro North is "in the tank," he said.

"There is no doubt that is a very under-utilized asset. It's pretty much weighed down the market for years," Fullerton said. "The Northland market needs for that intersection (of Northwest Barry Road and U.S. Highway 169) to be strong."

Metcalf South, No. 9 on the Business Journal's list with 735,000 square feet of stores, stands amid the Metcalf Avenue corridor north



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 Metro North Shopping Center, 400 N.W. Barry Road, Kansas City.



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 Metcalf South Shopping Center, 9635 Metcalf Ave., Overland Park.

of Interstate 435 that Overland Park wants to revitalize.

Curt Skoog, an Overland Park City Council member, said the mall's location south of 95th Street "is key for the long-term vibrancy of Metcalf."

"The hope is it will be an anchor for larger-scale redevelopment," said Skoog, who had not been briefed on the mall owners' plans. "We need a newer approach to commercial property — at a minimum, a newer-style shopping experience. I hope we can include multiuse components."

Alberta Development's credentials for this work are strong. Its portfolio includes the aging Southglenn Mall in Centennial, Colo., which is being transformed with housing, walkways and outdoor meeting spaces.

Centennial spokeswoman Nancy Reubert said Southglenn's makeover will strengthen the tax base in an economically stagnant neighborhood that was built in the 1950s and 1960s.

Southglenn, the city's only mall, is surrounded by houses.

"So you have to be creative with that (mall) land," Reubert said.

The areas surrounding Metro North and Metcalf South also have become tired. The average household income within a mile of

each mall in 2005 was slightly less than the metro average reported by Claritas Inc., a San Diego-based compiler of demographic data.

About a half-dozen other mixed-use redevelopments are under way in metropolitan Kansas City. This includes The Gateway project at the former Mission Center mall. The 17-acre, 1.3 million-square-foot project by the Cameron Group LLC of Syracuse, N.Y., is set to open in 2008.

Doyle Hyett, chairman of HyettPalma Inc., a suburban Washington-based consultant that advised The Gateway's owner, said single-use malls are dated.

"People are fed up with the sameness across the suburban landscape," he said.

Hyett predicted that more older shopping centers will undergo changes and said each one needs to fit its surroundings' demographics. Mission differs from Overland Park or Kansas City, North, he said.

"You can make a lot of money with something that speaks to the tastes of Americans — the buying public," he said. "Not just from a product perspective but from an aesthetic and a mixed-use, functional perspective, as well."

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