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Infrastructure work begins on North College Marketplace, King Soopers

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One project does not a resurgence make, but residents and businesses along North College Avenue said big things are starting to happen along the long-suffering corridor.

Infrastructure work on roads, wetlands mitigation and utilities began in earnest Monday on the southeast corner of Willox Lane and North College Avenue, the future home of the North College Marketplace and a 123,000-square-foot King Soopers.

Infrastructure alone is expected to take six months before construction can begin on the grocery store, said Eric Holsapple, owner of Loveland Commercial LLC, which is developing the \$40 million marketplace.

Work on improvements to the North College/Wilcox intersection is expected to begin next summer.

"I'm relieved to start the work," Holsapple said. "It's exciting."

The project, including the biggest King Soopers in the city, is the first major development since City Council approved the North College Urban Renewal Plan in 2004.

The City Council, acting as the Urban Renewal Authority, approved using \$8 million in tax funding for the 525-acre development, which is expected to house other retail, restaurants and a bank and \$16.4 million for the area during 21 years.

The \$8 million will go toward a variety of improvements, including street and utility work and wetlands mitigation.

The council, acting as the city's Urban Renewal Authority, said the development would be a boon for a neglected part of town.

The marketplace is the first major project to break ground in the URA.

It is expected to be followed by the Rocky Mountain Innovation Initiative on Vine Drive, Union Place, a mixed-use project on the northwest corner of Wilcox and North College and rebuilding of North College Avenue from Vine Drive to Conifer Street.

Union Place includes eight single-family homes, 30 triplexes, 37 condos and 14 mixed-use units.

For business owners along North College Avenue, the changes have been a long time coming.

"It's been a long journey. You always want things to happen quicker than they do," said Dean Hoag, owner of Rocky Mountain Battery/Recycling Center and president of the North Fort Collins Business

Association.

"But now that we can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel, it's really encouraging. Major things are going to happen in this area. ... I'm pretty proud of what's going on."

The new projects are expected to bring more people to North College. In turn, "it's gotta be positive for the businesses up here," Hoag said.

Bullfrog Wine & Spirits owner Dwight Whitney is considering moving his liquor store from the Albertsons plaza across the street to the marketplace.

"It would possibly be a bigger store and generate more traffic," he said. Whitney and developers are "holding conversations" about the possible move, and Whitney expects to make a decision very soon.

Whitney also worries the Albertsons may not survive even if he stays where he is.

"They've been good people to be next to, no question, but there are concerns there."

Albertsons LLC has been closing stores throughout Colorado but declined comment on the future of the North College store.

"Due to the competitive nature of our business, we don't comment on competitive environments," spokesman Christine Wilcox wrote in an e-mail to the Coloradoan.

Hoag hopes Albertsons can stay competitive and survive to provide a more competitive market for North Fort Collins residents.

"I'm sure King Soopers is going to affect Albertsons, but hopefully they can both coexist next to each other," Hoag said.

Loveland Commercial LLC and King Soopers signed the contract two weeks ago, more than a year after negotiations first commenced.
