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Ball rolling on North College Marketplace

Shopping plaza will be home to new King Soopers, billed as largest grocery store in city

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Loveland Commercial LLC will break ground Thursday on a King Soopers-anchored shopping plaza on the northeast corner of Willox Lane and North College Avenue.

The \$40 million marketplace will be home to a 123,000-square-foot King Soopers, billed as the largest grocery store in the city.

Infrastructure work on roads, wetlands mitigation and utilities in the 27-acre project began in earnest three weeks ago and is expected to take six months before construction gets under way on King Soopers.

The project is the first major development in north Fort Collins since City Council approved the North College Urban Renewal Plan in 2004.

"This is history in the making ... it's a milestone ... it's monumental," said Ron Lautzenheiser, owner of Grease Monkey and Big O Tires and a member of the North College Citizens Advisory Group.

The marketplace, coupled with 100 new houses being developed by Donna Merton, a new technology park on Vine Drive and expansion of ion blaster manufacturer Kaufman & Robinson, is expected to lead the rebirth along the city's northern gateway.

"We haven't had any major investments in the area in the last 25 years," Lautzenheiser said. Meanwhile, many businesses have left the area, leaving an array of empty shops, decaying buildings and lack of services for North College neighborhoods.

Lautzenheiser expects the marketplace and other redevelopment to be a regional draw, provide services for north Fort Collins residents and give people a reason to "travel across the tracks."

"The only reason people drove north of the tracks was to go to Jax (Outdoor Gear) to shop or to go to the Poudre Canyon. The new marketplace will give people a reason to come outside the area and go to the north side and give people who live there a place to work and shop" when it is built out.

The marketplace is expected to provide more than 300 jobs as it builds out. King Soopers is expected to open in early 2011 with completion of the entire project in 2013, Loveland Commercial principal Eric Holsapple said.

While the groundbreaking is largely ceremonial, Holsapple said it gives him a "chance to thank the city, City Council, (city manager) Darin Atteberry and (chief financial officer) Mike Freeman and that whole crew that was behind us as well as the North Fort Collins Business Association. They were a tremendous help to us."

The business association helped get momentum going toward the north side, Holsapple said, and made it easier for Loveland Commercial to come in with a project. "This is the best business association I've seen in 25 years as far as really making a difference."

Without the elimination of the Dry Creek floodplain and formation of the urban renewal district, however, redevelopment would not have been possible, Lautzenheiser said.

"Those two events allowed Eric (Holsapple) to go after his project and make it happen," Lautzenheiser said. "If either of them were still in place, this wouldn't have happened."

By reducing the size of the floodplain from 1,400 acres to 300 acres in the \$10 million, three-year project, the city cleared the way for new development along the corridor and did away with the need for some businesses to carry flood insurance.

The City Council, acting as the Urban Renewal Authority, approved using \$8 million in tax funding for the North College Market-place, which is expected to generate about \$16.4 million for the area during 21 years.

"This is the next chapter in this book we're writing about the old downtown north coming alive again. It's pretty important," Lautzenheiser said.

Additional Facts

Interested?

The groundbreaking will be at 2:30 p.m. Thursday on the northeast corner of Willox Lane and North College Avenue.
