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Saturday, October 6, 2007

## Detroit mall still on track

Developers: Deals under way for city's first shopping center since '90s


Nathan Hurst / The Detroit News

**DETROIT** -- An \$80 million development that would bring a full-scale shopping center to the city will break ground later than originally expected but is still drawing strong support from local officials and interest from potential retailers, the project's developers said this week.

The Shoppes at Gateway Park, an open air mall, is slated to bring more than 330,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space to the intersection of Eight Mile and Woodward on the northern edge of Detroit, adjacent to the Michigan State Fairgrounds.

Construction of the project, announced in March, was originally set to begin by the end of this year and was to be completed by March 2009. The groundbreaking now is planned for mid- to late spring of next year, with the opening date of the center still uncertain.

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The timetable was pushed back because the developer, General Growth Properties, based in Chicago, first wanted to secure enough tenant interest to ensure the project's success.

"Because we're attracting a number of big-name tenants, we're choosing to hold off on making any official announcement (of tenants) at this time," said Lyneir Richardson, vice president of urban retail development for General Growth Properties. "But I can say for certain that the interest is there, deals are happening and we expect to have work started on the center sometime in late spring of next year."

The shopping center plan calls for one anchor store, five smaller "junior box" retailers, up to five restaurants and up to 40 smaller shops, likely to be a mix of locally owned stores and national chains.

Investors in the project said in March that department store J.C. Penney had penned a [letter of intent](#) to serve as the anchor tenant for the project. Penney's officials confirmed that letter of intent was sent in March, but an official lease agreement has yet to be signed.

If Penney's does locate to the new mall, it would be Detroit's only department store. The last one, Crowley's in the New Center area, closed in the late 1990s.

Richardson confirmed that Penney officials were still on board, but he declined to name any other prospective mall tenants.

**Officials confident in mall**

Bernie Schrott of Bloomfield Hills, the largest of the center's minority investors, is confident the mall will be built, and that General Growth Properties will attract a healthy mix of retailers and stimulate other development in the region.

A [real estate investment trust](#) established in 1954, General Growth Properties is a heavyweight in the shopping center business. The company operates malls in 44 states. It has 12 shopping centers in Michigan, including Lakeside Mall in Sterling Heights and Southland Center in Taylor.

"I still think this is a great project for Detroit and it will be an instigator for even more growth in the community," said Schrott, who was a key player in getting the project off the ground. "This isn't a flash-in-the-pan idea. It will happen and spur other great things to happen."

City officials remain confident in the project, as well, and are awaiting site development plans.

"As far as we know, the project is still a go, and we think it's a good thing for the city," said Matt Allen, spokesman for Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick. "The mayor has been a champion of new retail, and this is exactly

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**Extras**

**The project at a glance**

**What:** The Shoppes at Gateway Park, a 300,000-square-foot shopping center.  
**Where:** Eight Mile and Woodward on the northern edge of Detroit, adjacent to the Michigan State Fairgrounds.  
**Timetable:** Sometime in late spring of 2008; completion date uncertain  
**Developer:** General Growth Properties of Chicago.  
**Retail plans:** J.C. Penney is pegged as the anchor store, with about 100,000 square feet. Also planned are five additional "junior box" retailers, totaling another 100,000 square feet; five restaurants, totaling about 30,000 square feet; and up to 40 smaller shops.  
**What's next**  
Developers will submit final site plans by the end of this year. Construction is slated to begin by mid- to late spring 2008.

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in line with that mission."

**Penney's could be key player**

The developer's road improvement and traffic abatement plan for the project has received the go-ahead from the state, according to Tami Salisbury, [executive director](#) of the Eight Mile Boulevard Association.

The developer is now drawing up final site plans for city approval, a process Salisbury expects to be finished by year's end.

"There's a lot of momentum on this project," Salisbury said. "The city wants this and people around here need this."

Salisbury said a study released Monday by Social Compact Inc. that estimated Detroit's population stood at nearly 62,000 people more than official Census estimates has boosted interest in the project.

"The study also showed that expendable income here is much higher than the Census estimated," Salisbury said. "That's important as we convince retailers that this is a viable place to be."

It's still not an easy sales job, retail analysts said. The location of The Shoppes at Gateway and the tough nature of doing business in Detroit are real hurdles.

Yet landing Penney's as the anchor store would go a long way toward ensuring the mall's development and success, one analyst said. "Penney's is trying to go after a higher line of customer," Birmingham retail consultant Ed Nakfoor said, "and they could provide this mall the traction they need to get going."

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