

Big dreams to redevelop Centerville Place on hold

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In its current state, Centerville Place Shopping Center is a “decently successful” strip mall along Ohio 48, but City Planner Andrew Rodney sees potential to transform it into a community gathering place.

However, a city council-approved proposal to redevelop this “pivotal” 25-acre segment of Centerville’s commercial real estate has been on hold for nearly two years as its owner remains out of contact.

“We see it as an opportunity to create almost a village or a new downtown, if you will, with a focus of boutique retail, experiential restaurants and then some higher-density residential apartments or townhomes all coexisting in one space,” Rodney said.



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The city of Centerville commissioned a master plan for possible re-use of what the city dubs Centerville Place Shopping Center on Ohio 48.

A buyer operating as Queen City Lease Management LLC purchased the 330,000-square-foot shopping center in July 2017 and bought up 12 adjacent acres of vacant land behind the strip mall just a few months later. Communication has been “nonexistent,” Rodney said, despite multiple efforts to reach John Reister, the West Chester Township-based real estate attorney who incorporated Queen City Lease in 2017.

“(We’ve) left voicemails, sent emails, even sent a copy of the plan with a cover letter and my business card inviting him to speak. We’ve never received a single communication,” Rodney said. “Having it sit in its current state and not having the opportunity to be at the table where decisions are made is a bit difficult and kind of stressful, but it’s not necessarily out of the ordinary, unfortunately.”

Queen City Lease doesn’t appear to have any immediate redevelopment plans in the works, according to Centerville’s Chief Building Official Dan Sammon. He said no additional applications for permits have been filed for the shopping center since its purchase in 2017. Multiple attempts from the Dayton Business Journal to reach Reister for comment also went unanswered.

“If the owner were to engage with us, we’re not going to slap the plan in front of them and say, ‘You shall do this,’” Rodney explained. “It’s more of a way to start a conversation about what the community vision is for this, what the potential benefits could be for a developer and how we can work together to achieve a common vision.”

Centerville unveiled that vision in January 2017, after obtaining a \$17,000 grant from the Montgomery County Land Bank to analyze the best ways to redevelop the area. A market analysis performed by Market Metric\$ predicted that residential development and limited dining, retail and entertainment uses would find success. They advised against adding office space due to “chronically high office vacancy rates” in the neighborhood.

A steering committee, including representatives from the former owner, city council, Huber Management and Kroger, devised the vision to include apartments or townhomes as a form of transitional housing. Rodney said the redevelopment could provide a walkable, urban environment to appeal to new, young families or give older residents downsizing from single-family homes “another choice other than buying a golf-cart house or moving to an assisted-living facility.”

A former Kroger store at the site has been vacant since December 2011, when it moved into an enormous Kroger Marketplace at the opposite end of the shopping center. Rodney said the city looks at redeveloping Centerville Place as an opportunity to reimagine this main commercial corridor along South Main Street as more than just an old Kroger and acres of parking. They want to transform it into a gathering space for the whole community.

“Other than Stubbs Park, we really don't have a commercial-oriented gathering space where people can come and enjoy a bite to eat or a drink with friends, shop for a unique gift and visit a friend in their apartment or townhouse,” Rodney said. “We don't have any place that has all of that in one place.”

The proposed master plan includes a central green with a stage for musical performances or other public entertainment, but Rodney doesn't see it as competing with venues like Kettering's Frazee Pavilion or The Greene Town Center in Beavercreek. They envision it more as a local draw for residents living within a 15-minute drive of the current shopping center.

Ideally, construction would proceed in phases on the areas closer to Main Street and work toward the rear of the property, Rodney said, allowing leases to expire in the current strip mall and moving tenants into the proposed, newer buildings to allow for demolition.

Of course, those plans are all just suggestions of what Centerville would like to see transferred into reality along South Main Street. Until Queen City Lease Management opens up those lines of communication or sells to another owner, Rodney and his colleagues at the city manager's office just around the corner from Centerville Place will keep waiting for a seat at the decision-making table.