

Facelift of Humboldt Mall Officially Underway

Christopher Lee / Humboldt Journal

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Photo courtesy of Steve Benjamin

After first purchasing the Humboldt Mall in late 2013, Stromiga Real Estate Development has gotten underway on the redevelopment on the mall. Work began on the redevelopment on Sept. 11 that will see the mall name changed from the Humboldt Mall to Humboldt Commons.

The redevelopment plans will see the mall converted from a mall to a strip mall, with the removal of the hallway and north side of the building. The project will see the Extra Foods, which is currently under construction by Loblaws being converted into a No Frills, with the building size remaining as is, and the entrance to the No Frills, being the current mall entrance. Stromiga Co-Owner Steven Benjamin notes they elected to keep the mall entrance for No Frills, after extensive conversations with Loblaws.

“The No Frills store wanted to continue their entry the way it currently is, the orientation works better.”

The Bargain Shop will also remain as it currently is, says Benjamin with the only change being that there will be an entrance added to the building facing the parking lot.

The project will be done in two phases, says Benjamin, with Phase I, seeing the façade on the mall being redeveloped, as well as signage, and colour, and a supporting wall being installed inside the current mall. Both projects will be very large and quite difficult, says Benjamin. Redeveloping the façade on the front of the building will require the pre-existing façade to be removed in sections and a new façade added.

“That’s actually the most challenging part of the project because we can’t just hang the new façade on the old building.”

The interior wall is also going to be quite difficult, notes Benjamin, who says they will be constructing the wall on the line, where the current interior walls are now.

Despite major work being done to both the exterior and interior of the building Benjamin notes that both entrances and the mall will remain open throughout construction. The current work that will be done to the mall is necessary, notes Benjamin because the mall is lacking tenants and he expects that they will be able to greatly increase tenants with the redevelopment plan.

Benjamin notes that he does not feel the shortage of tenants is a fair representation of Humboldt either, noting the city is growing not shrinking.

“If the town is growing then typically retailers will want to move in to a town not move out of a town. And yet they’re moving out (of the mall) so it’s because there isn’t adequate space or the space that’s available is too expensive.”

Benjamin notes that once they are completed the redevelopment there will be a large benefit to the tenants.

“It will reduce the footprint of the shopping centre, it will greatly increase the visibility for all the tenants because they’ll all have visibility and it will greatly decrease the operating cost of the centre.”

Currently, the expectation is that the mall will feature No Frills, Dollarama, Warehouse One, The Source, and The Bargain Shop, with a number of other stores still needing to be filled, but Benjamin notes that has not yet been confirmed, and says he is still in active conversations with some of those tenants.

“It is our anticipation, our hope, that as these shopping centres are developed retailers will have interest... So, by redeveloping this and creating more visibility and reducing operating costs we believe that we’ll be able to attract additional retailers to the City of Humboldt.”

In addition to those stores going in Benjamin notes he expects there will likely also be a rebranding of the gas bar on the property as well since Loblaw's sold their gas bars to Mobil.

“It would be my expectation that that’s what they’re going to do because why would they buy it if they didn’t want to brand it and start building a reputation across Canada as a retailer of gasoline products. But we don’t have any specifics on that.”

Work will remain ongoing for the foreseeable future, and Benjamin says the tentative completion timeline of Phase I is summer 2018, and the tentative completion timeline for Phase II is the end of 2018.

With so much being eliminated from the lot, Benjamin says they are currently looking at ways to fill some of the empty space noting their current plan would be to add a multi-family housing unit, but says that will not be done for the foreseeable future.

Benjamin remains optimistic about the project, and says the City of Humboldt has been a terrific help in their preparations for redevelopment, and says they are not flippers and plan to operate the Humboldt Commons, once redevelopment is complete.

“We’re definitely invested in the city of Humboldt.”