

Interchange plan nears completion

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By **BOB OKON** Staff writer

JOLIET -- City staff met with representatives from O&S Holdings to try and finalize plans for an interchange that would make the previously announced 1.5 million-square-foot lifestyle retail center a reality.

O&S Holdings is the Santa Monica, Calif.-based developer that wants to build the Bridge Street Town Centre in the northeast corner of where Interstates 55 and 80 meet.

"Our staff has had a lot of meetings with them (O&S) and prospective stores," said City Manager John Mezera.

Without naming names, Mezera said the retailers in the mix include department stores and specialty boutiques along with high-end restaurants.

O&S in July announced that Regal Entertainment Group has agreed to build an 18-screen movie theatre at the Joliet site. But no other tenants have been announced since.

Spokeswoman Rachel Forman said O&S continues to negotiate with possible tenants but has not reached deals that can be announced.

Foreman said O&S would like to break ground sometime in 2009. That's later than previous estimates from the city, which have ranged from late summer to the end of this year.

So far, much of the city's work has been devoted to the less splashy business of planning for an interchange off of I-55 to create access to the Bridge Street Town Center. That work should be done in a couple of weeks, Mezera said, and then city staff will visit with Joliet Junior College and other "stakeholders" along possible routes from the Bridge Street Town Center to Houbolt Road.

The road is a big topic of conversation at Joliet Junior College, where many faculty members have objected to the idea of a major commercial thoroughfare running along the south end of the campus.

That's the city's preferred route for a road that would run from Houbolt to the shopping district. But the city needs college cooperation, since JJC owns the designated land.

JJC board Chairman Robert Wunderlich said the college has no official position on the road.

"We've never got a proposal from the city," he said.

JJC officials have talked with city staff about the road's impact and how college concerns could be accommodated.

"We are going to talk with them again," Wunderlich said, noting a meeting has been scheduled for Feb. 25. "We're going to talk with them about our master plan."

College officials are looking for possible trade-offs with the city and O&S that might help JJC with its own infrastructure needs.

Wunderlich said O&S has worked cooperatively with a community college on another project it is developing in Texas.

That development in McKinney, Texas, and the Joliet center would be among the largest in the O&S portfolio, which now includes nine properties open for business in California, Nevada, Texas, Louisiana and Alabama. Besides the properties in McKinney and Joliet, O&S has one other property under development in Fresno, Calif.

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