

Hammond mall to be rebuilt

By [DEBRA LEMOINE](#)

Advocate Florida parishes bureau

Published: Mar 5, 2007

HAMMOND — What was once the center of shopping in Hammond is now a half-empty building off Interstate 12.

Half the stores at the 30-year-old Hammond Square Mall are shuttered, and the parking lot is pock-marked with pot holes .

It looks on the surface like a retail slump, but residents here hope this is really the beginning of a shopping revival.

“A lot of the stores are closed now,” said Patty Mizell, a mall shopper who lives in Ponchatoula. “We understand they are closing in a few weeks. We’re going to get a strip mall.”

In September, Stirling Properties Chairman Jimmy Maurin announced that the mall will be bulldozed and a outdoor lifestyle center twice the size will be erected in its place.

Last week, Maurin said the \$100 million redevelopment is on time and should be completed by the end of 2008.

Mall stores have until March 31 to leave the property, and many businesses, such as national chains, The Limited and Chick-Fil-A, have already left. The agreement between mall tenants and the new mall owners was for the tenants to stay through the Christmas shopping season and leave by March 31, Maurin said.

Sometime in April, the main mall structure will be bulldozed to prepare for the new stores. Demolition of the JC Penney store and the old Hammond Tire Store located on the edge of the mall property will begin this week, Maurin said.

Dillard’s, Sears and Rite Aid will remain open during the construction process, he said. The Chase Bank and Shell gas station at the front edge of the mall property also will remain open.

Maurin said he was not ready to make more announcements of stores coming to new shopping center. In September, Maurin said that Target, Home Depot and JC Penney will be part of the new Hammond Square.

Hammond Square Mall had been on the decline in recent years, with business picking up only after Hurricane Katrina shifted large numbers of New Orleans-area residents north of Lake Pontchartrain.

Palace Properties purchased the mall for \$14 million in May from Sizeler Properties. The sale had been hailed by city officials and business leaders as a boon for the community and a sign that the mall finally will be revitalized.

Stirling Properties is managing and redeveloping the mall.

Mizell said that as long as she gets more stores she wants to shop at, she does not mind the upcoming year without a mall.

“We’re tired of going to Baton Rouge and Mandeville for all the ‘in’ stores,” said Mizell. “I’d like to see a Hollister or an Abercrombie. That would be a great thing — well worth the wait.”

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