

J.C. Penney's coming down

By Lil Mirando

Fencing has been erected around the J.C. Penney's building at Hammond Square, and Stirling Properties CEO James Maurin looks for demolition to start Tuesday or Wednesday.

"The initial demolition work will be on the old J.C. Penney's building, which has been vacated for a while, and the old tire store" Maurin said Friday "We won't start with the mall itself until May or so."

He estimates demolition of Penney's and the tire store will take 60 days and tearing down the mall will take 90 days.

From an engineering perspective, the plan to raze all the mall except for the Dillard's, Sears and Rite Aid stores has been what Maurin called "one of our most difficult projects."

"Most of the demolition will be done from the rear. We will build a big wall so that if you're coming to Hammond Square, you won't see the demolition from the front," he said. "People will still be able to go to the front and the side of Sears to a certain point, but then everything behind that will be fenced off and will be a big construction site.

"When the demolition starts, we don't want any pedestrians back there," he said.

The leveling of Hammond Square is a precursor to the long-awaited, much anticipated construction of a new retail development over more than 100 acres.

The plan is to replace the 30-year-old enclosed mall with an open-air retail center.

Excitement is likely to build as the public sees work finally taking place, but Maurin predicts, "It will blow people's minds when we clear all the wooded area back to the creek."

That will give people a dramatic view of the development's size, he said.

Meanwhile, Stirling remains engaged in much legal work and paperwork involved with clearing out the current mall tenants.

Maurin said that too is progressing as expected toward the March 31 target date.