

As Boise site falls, ideas spring up

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A dreary and vacant industrial complex along Salem's waterfront is poised to become a gem, said Tim Gerling, a consultant working on the redevelopment of the Boise Cascade site.

"What we're talking about is true mixed use on a scale that Salem has not seen before," Gerling said.

Demolition on the Boise site started earlier this year. And this week, developers have been granted more demolition permits to take down the main Boise building north of Pringle Creek, Gerling said.

The 13-acre Boise site has already attracted interest from prospective occupants, including a health club, a hotel, restaurant and an office user. No deals have been finalized, Gerling said.

The consultant, a former public works director for Salem, gave the business community an update on the Boise Cascade site at a luncheon sponsored by the Strategic Economic Development Corp. More than 150 people attended the Thursday event.

In 2007, developers Dan Berrey and Larry Tokarski purchased the Boise Cascade site in downtown Salem for \$7.25 million.

The mixed-use development proposed for the property would include office buildings, shops, restaurants, and condominiums. It is designed to complement, not compete with the city's existing downtown businesses, Gerling said.

Work on the development is progressing, but it still faces obstacles:

- Removing structures that hide Pringle Creek from view, and restoration work along the creek's banks, will require approvals from as many as 18 government agencies and departments, Gerling said.

- The property's proposed access is from Front Street and Commercial Street, two of the city's busiest streets. Managing traffic flow and providing pedestrian access will be important issues, he said.

- The development also needs a public railroad crossing. The rights to use private railroad crossings on the Boise site did not transfer with the property's sale. That's created an access problem for a large portion of the site. Project backers are in negotiations with state officials in hopes of getting permission to create a public railroad crossing. "I am optimistic there is a solution," Gerling said.

The weak economy is another hurdle, but Gerling said he had confidence in Salem's ability to bounce back.

He noted some of the projects under way or proposed, such as the construction of Sanyo Solar of Oregon's new plant, and expansions by Salem Hospital and Willamette University.

Demolition schedule

Tearing down the Fry Warehouse at the Boise Cascade, commonly known as the "triangle building," began in February.

Demolition of other structures on the north side of Pringle Creek is expected to begin next week.

The demolition work will continue in stages and take about seven months to complete.

Source: Project consultant Tim Gerling, and staff reports.

"Salem has turned a corner. I'm not sure exactly when it happened," Gerling said. "We're not the town we were 30 years ago."

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