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Bush Development plans project at the 'gateway' to Fitzsimons

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By year-end, a local developer will start transforming a "signature" corner into a much-needed link between the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center and Fitzsimons Boundary Area District, and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Bush Development will start construction in the fourth quarter on Fitzsimons Promenade, a 4.5-acre site at the southeast corner of Peoria Street and Colfax Avenue, directly across from the main entrance of the Fitzsimons redevelopment, in Aurora.

"We're very excited about the project," Troy G. Smith, vice president of development for Bush Development, said of Fitzsimons Promenade, which at build-out will total 51,620 square feet. "It's located at a signature corner and will be providing a gateway to Fitzsimons."

The project will combine and redevelop the multiple land parcels as well as the three existing buildings on the site into a unified retail and restaurant center, noted Smith. Development of Fitzsimons Promenade also will include a partial exterior renovation of the existing Checker building at 12100 E. Colfax Ave.

Fitzsimons Promenade will feature smaller-scale development to enhance pedestrian connectivity between the site and the adjacent neighborhood and hospitals. As part of the pedestrian-oriented design, a plaza facing the corner of Colfax and Peoria with a signage wall and water feature will signify entrance into the Fitzsimons district for eastbound travelers.

The plaza will include seating for diners at on-site restaurants as well as a staging area for individuals awaiting public transportation.

Fitzsimons Promenade is expected to attract tenants such as quick-service restaurants, retailers and neighborhood service providers. As well, several banks have expressed interest in joining Fitzsimons Promenade, said Smith.

Crosbie Real Estate Group's Rich Hobbs and Andy Buettner are marketing Fitzsimons Promenade, which can accommodate 800- to 25,000-sf tenants.

Studio DH Architecture is designing the five-building project, which will incorporate vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian circulation systems with shared entryways from streets and connections to public transportation, public sidewalks and bicycle and vehicular parking. Also, a future pedestrian

connection to the residential redevelopment boundary at East 14th Avenue is part of Fitzsimons Promenade's design.

The project also will include direct signalized access to the Fitzsimons campus and "maximized" green space with grass, tree, shrub and flower plantings throughout.

Waner Construction is the contractor.

Other News

The Denver metropolitan retail market continued its positive trend in the first quarter, albeit at a lower pace than previous quarters, according to CB Richard Ellis' report on the market.

The vacancy rate decreased from 5.4 percent in the fourth quarter of 2006 to 5.2 percent in the first quarter. Availability also decreased to 5.6 percent, down 0.2 percentage points in the first quarter, compared with the fourth quarter.

While the overall absorption level was lower than seen in previous quarters, direct net absorption remained positive with 167,948 square feet absorbed.

The report noted that new construction is prompting landlords to renovate or lower rates at their centers to retain tenants, which resulted in a 50 cent decrease in first quarter average asking lease rates to \$16.08 per sf. The Boulder submarket posted the highest rate of \$21.50 per sf, according to CB's Denver Retail MarketView.

Construction activity increased to 4.6 million sf in the first quarter with more than 6 million sf still in the pipeline. The majority of planned projects are located in Aurora while mixed-use and transit-oriented developments are attracting interest as well.

CB Richard Ellis reports that with the bulk of large, suburban projects completed or under way, developers are readjusting their focus to mixed-use, transit-oriented and infill projects. With rising energy costs and a declining housing market, demand may stall slightly this year. However, the report notes that momentum will return by year-end and the long-term outlook for Denver remains bullish. ♦♦