

**Strip mall owners discover it's renovate or fade away
Older properties get major overhauls to compete with newer shopping developments.**

It's obvious that Frederick Square hasn't been extensively remodeled for at least 30 years. The shopping center south of 84th Street and West Center Road has dull colors, cracked sidewalks and an outdated design.

"It's just a tired center," said Trenton Magid, president of Coldwell Banker Commercial World Group, the leasing agent and development consultant for the center. "It's well overdue in getting remodeled."

The pizzazz of recently built shopping centers is pushing some of Omaha's oldest plazas to get a fresh look of their own.

"Subliminally, people like to go to new and vibrant shopping centers with a sense of life," said Patrice Duker, spokeswoman for the International Council of Shopping Centers. "Centers are renovating because of competition. By renovating and redeveloping storefronts, they are creating a more enjoyable shopping experience."

Frederick Square, owned by JM Properties Inc., plans \$3 million in renovations that are scheduled to begin in March and to be completed by September, Magid said.

"When it's finished it's going to look like it was a ground-up development," he said. "Our goal is to make it look brand new."

Planned renovations include rebuilding all storefronts, widening sidewalks, replacing windows, creating new parking areas and redesigning the square's logo. Omaha's first ShopKo store will remain one of the center's anchors and also will undergo renovations of its own, Magid said.

"It's a prime 20-acre piece of property with 195,000 square feet of (planned) improvements," he said. "By improving the shopping center and making it new, we are providing an opportunity in the middle of Omaha that hasn't existed for retailers in a long time."

Shopping centers traditionally renovate every seven to 10 years, Duker said. But some wait longer.

Tara Plaza in Papillion completed more than \$1 million in renovations last month, only the second time it has been upgraded since it was built in 1968, said Mike Hogan, president of Hogan and Co., owner of the plaza.

"We tore off the old facade and put on a much bigger one," Hogan said. "The signage is much more visible and easy for the public to identify."

Now the shopping center has brighter and more attractive colors, from blue to earth tones and sun colors, Hogan said.

"It just gives you a much different feeling," he said. "We wanted to remain competitive and have the look of 2006 and beyond."

Village Pointe, an open-air mall at 168th Street and West Dodge Road, has been the prototype for several shopping centers seeking a new look. John Bacon, spokesman for RED Development, the developer of Village Pointe, said people want to shop in a comfortable and welcoming environment.

"The reason Village Pointe has been successful from a design standpoint is because it seems like it's (always) been there," Bacon said. "It's a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere."

Managers of nearby Linden Market at 132nd Street and West Dodge Road have taken note.

"We look at Village Pointe and its amenities in terms of outdoor seating, attractive design, color pavement, lighting and landscaping, and that's something to compete with," said Tim Kerrigan, a partner at Investors Realty and Realtor for Linden Market. "They have many of the same demographics we do, and we need to be customer-friendly to attract customers and tenants. That's a lot of what has drawn tenants and customers to Village Pointe. Those are the things we want to provide."

Linden Market's owner, a local group of private investors, invested about \$1 million to renovate the center in the fall of 2005 -- the first time since it was built in the 1980s, Kerrigan said. The project was completed last spring.

"The motivation for renovation is certainly to keep up with the new projects out there, but also to protect the asset itself," Kerrigan said. "What developers and landowners find is the new projects usually have a lot of pizzazz, but the older locations frequently have superior demographics and sit in more established trade areas. If you can bring some newness back to those older properties, you can offer tenants the best of both worlds."

Linden Market, anchored by a Hy-Vee supermarket, received new signage and new entrances and exits to create easier access for motorists, Kerrigan said. Other renovations included realigning the parking lot for frontdoor parking, adding landscaping and public art, and making common areas more welcoming with well-lit seating areas.

"So far the renovations have resulted in higher rents, lease renewals and interest from prospects we might otherwise not have," Kerrigan said. "We think there's been a direct impact on the business. It's been a success for everybody."

Montclair on Center near 132nd Street and West Center Road renovates regularly, said Ted Seldin, chairman of Seldin Co., which represents the plaza's owners.

"We constantly renovate and update," Seldin said of Montclair, which was built in 1972. "It's been done four times in the last 15 years."

Seldin said the most recent renovations, completed in the fall of 2006, included adding modern architectural designs and colors, creating new signage and adding a 44-foot clock tower.

"The sales certainly are enhanced if you have a modern, good-looking shopping center that is well maintained. We continue to look at and meet competition as it develops.

"We have an excellent location and a high-dense population and that justified reinvesting to the shopping center."

Duker said it's common to see developers creating strip malls that are more like small communities.

"I think it just shows how much architecture trends have changed," Duker said. "Traditionally, centers were L-shaped and U-shaped, but now developers are creating a place where you don't just run in to grab one item."

Harvey Oaks, near 144th and West Center Road, was one of the first shopping centers in west Omaha when it opened in 1984.

That didn't last for long.

"As Omaha moved westward, we were no longer the new kids on the block," said Jeff Kirshenbaum, vice president of Noddle Companies, owner of Harvey Oaks. "As the building gets older and more tired-looking, it's harder to attract customers. They prefer to shop at newer properties, and tenants prefer to rent those, too. They go hand in hand."

Kirshenbaum said \$1 million in renovations, which began in the spring of 2005 and were completed in the fall of 2005, included demolishing the front fascia of the building to accommodate new signage and a more contemporary design.

"We wanted to make it seem brighter, so we added tremendous architectural lighting to stand out at night," he said.

Noddle Companies also redesigned the parking lot and signage.

"The renovation of Harvey Oaks is directly attributed to 30,000 square feet of space that has new or renewed leases in the last 12 months," Kirshenbaum said. "For us it's been fabulous; it allows us to compete with the newer centers."

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