

Consumer Square East comes tumbling down after 23 years

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Backhoes and claws from Loewendick Demolition Contractors chew up the empty storefronts at Consumer Square East at Brice Road just south of I-70.



Consumer Square East, a sprawling, 23-year-old retail destination, is coming down in a heap of rubble, its owner hopeful that the demolition will help the site gain a new life.

Benderson Development of Florida recently decided to raze the center to make the 40-acre site along I-70 near Brice Road more attractive to future tenants.

"We demolished the property because it will show the best," company principal Randy Benderson said. "We feel it's a very good property even though the (Brice Road) corridor has changed."

As rain poured down yesterday, demolition crews hacked away at what used to be the Factory Card Outlet store at Consumer Square East, another piece of bad news for the struggling Brice Road retail scene.

Brice Road is slowly being abandoned as new centers sprout up nearby. Stores such as Best Buy, Babies "R" Us and hhgregg recently fled for Taylor Square in Reynoldsburg, about 2 miles east of Brice Road.

Target could be next. A new Target store is expected to open in Reynoldsburg near Taylor Square on March 8. Speculation is that the Brice Road Target will close as a result, but a Target spokeswoman said yesterday that no decision has been made.

This past summer, the departure of a Meijer store in the Brice Road area left another huge retail void.

"They don't exactly have retailers beating down the doors to get there right now," said Columbus retail analyst Chris Boring of Boulevard Strategies. "I can't imagine (Benderson) doing something else with it, retail-wise. The market is terrible for everything. It's hard to think what that area would need."

Benderson thinks the site has promise, even if it's no longer a shopping center. It has frontage on a major highway and fairly easy access from the Brice Road interchange. One use, he said, could be for a car dealership.

"Brice Road is going through a transition. We would be open to anything, and it could be less traditional."

One building at Consumer Square East is remaining. It houses the JCPenney Furniture Outlet Store.

"We're going to be here," manager David Holland said, "and we're doing OK."

Consumer Square East once thrived. It boasted one of the first warehouse clubs in central Ohio and, over the years had such tenants as Cub Foods, Kroger and Builders Square, as well as a 14-screen cinema. A Burlington Coat Factory moved out this past year, in favor of a former Schottenstein's location at 6055 E. Main St.

Local developer Matt Stavroff thinks Benderson's property will be improved by the removal of the buildings.

"A lot of times when you want to land somebody, you bring them in and you have these improvements that are so unsightly and ill-configured it almost puts that negative connotation in your mind," he said. "When you have a smooth, clean site along an interstate, it can be marketed better."

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