



Photos by Laura J. Gardner | The Journal Gazette

Construction of a strip shopping center at Broadway and Taylor Street will begin in the spring. It's among several local retail projects that will reuse previously developed property.

Browner pastures

Retail projects spurning farmland for developed areas

BY SHERRY SLATER
The Journal Gazette

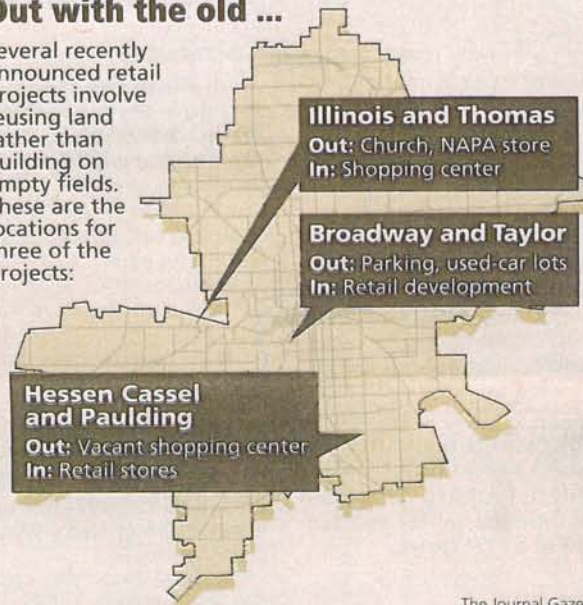
It's business as usual at Straley's Fort Wayne Auto Sales, where more than a dozen used cars, trucks and SUVs sat on the corner lot last week.

But the car lot's days on Broadway and Taylor Street are numbered.

Property owners Brian and Tim Straley are developing the site by spending about \$2.4 million to construct a strip shopping center made up of two multitenant buildings. The plans, unveiled in May, include building on the neighboring gravel parking lot and the properties where three homes now stand.

Out with the old ...

Several recently announced retail projects involve reusing land rather than building on empty fields. These are the locations for three of the projects:



You'll see that retail and other centers want to be near each other."

The commercial real estate developers expect the city's \$120 million Harrison Square project will trigger even more redevelopment.

"The whole downtown market will be" hot, Dickey said. "I think Harrison Square will have a dramatic effect on all downtown and places beyond the area directly downtown."

The Shoppes on Broadway was being planned before Harrison Square was proposed, Nugent said. Even so, the project would benefit if the downtown becomes more of a draw, he said.

Dickey thinks redevelop-

homes now stand.

Construction will likely begin in early spring, David Nugent, a partner in the real estate firm BND Commercial, said last week. BND is the leasing agent for the Shoppes on Broadway and has already signed some deals that Nugent isn't allowed to announce yet.

The shopping center is one of several local retail projects in progress that call for reusing previously developed property rather than building on former farmland. Other examples include the Target shopping center on Illinois and Thomas roads, where a church and other buildings originally stood, and the \$2 million remodeling of Casselwood Shopping Center, a vacant strip center at Hessen Cassel and Paulding roads.

It looks like Fort Wayne's retail sprawl is slowing to a crawl.

Less than 10 years ago, developers often opted to build their dreams on empty cornfields. Jefferson Pointe and the many small strip centers that have followed it along Illinois Road are examples of the recent retail explosion. But that's just the city's west side. To the east, Maysville Road



is home to numerous relatively new stores, including Wal-Mart and Kohl's.

Dan Dickey, president and co-owner of commercial real estate firm NAI Harding Dahm, said retailers want to build near other retailers, creating a destination like the auto dealers have done on Illinois Road.

After Jefferson Pointe opened, other retailers flocked to be near the outdoor-lifestyle mall on

West Jefferson Boulevard and Illinois Road. The most recent is the \$30 million to \$40 million Pine Tree Commercial Realty project, on a 32-acre site that was formerly home of Westridge Baptist Church and other buildings.

"Target needs to be near other retail," Dickey said, explaining why the Minneapolis-based discount department store chose the location. "This is very normal.

The Journal Gazette

A used-car dealer will make way for the \$2.4 million strip center planned for Taylor Street and Broadway.

ment of existing spaces city-wide is a trend. Nugent isn't convinced.

"I don't know if I can say it's a trend," he said. "I know I would love to see it. ... We always look for those opportunities. And when we see them, we will act on them."

Greg Leatherman, Fort Wayne's redevelopment director, can't quickly put his finger on statistics that show the number of retail developments springing up on greenfields compared with those in previously developed areas.

But, he said, city officials' plan to encourage commercial developers to place retail on existing commercial corridors, including Broadway and Anthony and State boulevards, is bearing fruit. The Shoppes on Broadway and the Casselwood Shopping Center projects are two that qualify for financial assistance because they are along Economic Development Target Areas, he said.

Usually, retail projects don't qualify for tax abatements, Leatherman said.

Fort Wayne's downtown has also been designated a target area, he said.

It's easy to understand

RETAIL

Continued from Page 1H

why redeveloping existing centers makes economic sense, Nugent said. People live in those neighborhoods and want to buy dresses, sandwiches and lattes.

Leatherman agreed that the areas allow retailers to be closer to their customers. The busi-

ness case is sound. The reason the city needs to offer financial incentives is to help offset the additional costs of demolishing an existing building or dealing with environmental hazards such as asbestos removal, he said.

Even if the pace seemed to have slowed, developers haven't stopped converting local farm fields into shopping destinations. Nugent said BND

Commercial is also involved in some projects that contribute to the city's sprawl.

When a housing development springs up in a cornfield, a retail strip center often follows on a nearby corner, he said.

"Retail developments happen where people live. That's where the rooftops are," he said. "That's the American way."

sslater@jg.net
