



Phase 2 of Sequoia Commons begins

555 S. Midvale Boulevard

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By Karen Rivedal

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Developers and city officials will gather next week to mark the second and final phase of the ambitious but sometimes contentious transformation of Madison's former Midvale Plaza into a \$34 million retail, residential and library center now known as Sequoia Commons.

"In general, it has gone really well," co-developer Joe Krupp said this week, "despite the fact that we've been operating in a pretty tough economic time. We're where we realistically would expect to be (with the project)."

The \$18 million first phase of the redevelopment, which Thursday's 10 a.m. groundbreaking ceremony also will showcase, was finished in June 2008 at Midvale and Tokay boulevards.

Phase 2 by development partners Krupp and Scott Kelly will cost \$16 million and be completed by spring 2011, they said. It will feature 10,000 square feet of retail space and a four-story, 100-unit apartment building with underground parking that raised the ire of neighbors last summer concerned about parking and increased traffic.

Those worries are still out there, said Ald. Chris Schmidt, District 11, despite the successful completion of Phase 1, which included five new stores, 45 condominiums and a bigger Sequoia library branch as project anchor.

No one was ever much concerned about Phase 1, said Schmidt, who now represents the area after former Ald. Tim Gruber declined to run for re-election in April. It's mainly the apartment building and resulting traffic that worries some residents, he said.

"People are generally reasonable about the whole thing, but there are definitely still concerns, and some of them are likely to turn out to be valid, about parking and traffic," said Schmidt, who plans to attend Thursday's ceremony with other officials including Mayor Dave Cieslewicz.

A major dispute over the entrance to the apartment building's parking garage last summer was resolved by a compromise calling for dual entrances - one on Midvale Boulevard and the other on Caromar Drive. The residents in opposition had wanted only one entrance, off busy Midvale, while the developers originally proposed using only Caromar Drive, a relatively quiet neighborhood street.

Krupp downplayed any remaining tensions, pointing instead to the success of the five stores that have opened and the public's embrace of the new Sequoia library, which library director Barb Dimick described as the busiest library building in the South Central Library System.

"I really think it has settled down," Krupp said. "In general, I think the neighborhood residents love what they've seen with the first phase. With the library and the retail opening, their fear of change or uncertainty has been very much alleviated."

Krupp noted that all 7,000 square feet of retail space designed for Phase 1 is filled, and 12 of the condominiums have sold. And while that's only a little more than a quarter of the available condos - which range in price from \$159,000 to \$465,000 - Krupp considered it a relative success, given the steep housing downturn of the past few years.

"It just speaks to the strength of that location," Krupp said. "We've got a high number of people in the wings waiting to sell their own homes. They have to sell to buy."

Krupp also touted the overall project's environmental and sustainability advances, noting the builders' extensive recycling of materials from the old building, the fact that it will be served by existing public infrastructure, and its improved stormwater management plan.

"It was a site that was one of the largest contributors to the Lake Wingra watershed, and we're treating or retaining over 75 percent of the water that used to just run down the storm pipe into the lake," he said. "That's a pretty significant feature."

Schmidt, meanwhile, pledged to keep a watchful eye on the project's progress.

"We'll just have to wait and see how it turns out," he said. "We'll have to deal with any issues that arise once it's completed and figure out how best to deal with them."