

## Efforts to Revive Richmond's 'Main Street' Move Forward

By Katherine Tam - West County Times

Article Launched: 06/13/2008 07:27:20 PM PDT -  
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RICHMOND — New street lights, benches, trees, trash containers and wider sidewalks are destined for the west end of Richmond's Macdonald Avenue as plans to revitalize the city's once vibrant "Main Street" continue.

Officials hope sprucing up the corridor and adding new housing will infuse energy into the center of town and lure others to invest as well.

"All this activity is very important in getting more private-sector investment," said Steve Duran, the city's community and economic development director. "They are more willing to go into it once they see we're making all these improvements for the better."

Crews began work this week from Harbour Way to 19th Street, with flaggers directing traffic through a series of orange cones. Once work is complete in April 2009, they will move onto the next stretch from Harbour Way to Garrard Boulevard, said Jacqueline Vaca, economic development assistant.

The work, which will also include drainage improvements, is expected to cost a combined \$15.9 million.

The first round of these streetscape improvements was added to the east end of the corridor last year. The final segment from 19th to 39th streets is estimated at \$6.9 million and is in the design stage.

City officials are pumping millions into projects along Macdonald Avenue, once the main commercial corridor before its rapid decline after Hilltop Mall opened to the north. A number of vacant and boarded-up buildings now dot the span.

Among the projects along Macdonald Avenue:

- On the east end: Construction continues on a 140,000-square-foot Target that will anchor a retail center where the old Montgomery Ward store stood for four decades before it closed in 2000. Target is slated to open July 23.
- To the west: Workers are repairing roofs, making seismic upgrades and installing heating and air conditioning systems as part of the \$101 million Civic Center renovation. City employees vacated City Hall in 2003 because the building was not seismically sound. In May 2006, police abandoned the adjacent Hall of Justice which suffers from leaks, mold and asbestos. Employees could move back into the refurbished City Hall as early as February 2009.

- At the new multitransit station: Where commuters connect to BART, Amtrak, Caltrain and Golden Gate Transit, officials are pulling together the paperwork for a new 800-space parking garage and plan to put the project out to bid next July. Completing the parking garage is key because it will free up the parking lot on the east end of the station, paving the way for at least 100 new housing units.

The planned \$110 million transit village is slated to carry more than 200 homes and 27,000 square feet of retail. Residents in 2004 began moving into some of the 132 town houses that made up the first housing phase.

- Between 3rd and 5th streets: Work on the 66-unit Macdonald Place Senior Housing began in late December. Rain caused some delays a few months ago, but construction is moving forward.

- 6th Street: Reconstruction of Nevin Park continues behind the chain-link fence. The \$2.8 million project includes two new fields, playground features, lighting, seating areas, walkways and a redesign to better link the community center to the park.

- 11th Street: Renovation of the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts in the historic Winters Building is slated to begin early next year. The \$10.5 million project will include a seismic retrofit, two new theaters, more classroom and performance space for the community and restoration of the historic facade, said Jordan Simmons, artistic director.

Programs and performances are expected to move to the Richmond Memorial Auditorium during the renovation, Simmons added.

- Between 11th and 13th streets: Efforts to build 237 condominiums with more than 24,000 square feet of retail space have struck a hurdle, Duran said. The city is working with developer A.F. Evans to secure financing, a step that has become challenging as the housing market and economy continue to sag.

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