

Felled trees at Clovis shopping center will be replaced

By Marc Benjamin
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It's been about 10 years since the Trading Post Shopping Center has thrived as a Clovis shopping site.

Today, the transition of the center at Clovis and Herndon avenues is obvious, but so far, it's not being looked upon favorably.

Most of the old trees — about 90% by one city official's estimate — have been chopped down. But new trees will blossom at the 119,000-square-foot center that was once home to a Save Mart supermarket and CVS.

City Planning Director Dwight Kroll said the developer must meet city codes, which require 50% shade coverage of the parking area in 10 years.

"We prefer not losing trees, but those trees have been damaged through pruning, and we would allow them to add trees as if it was a brand new center," he said.

He said the developers, Rich Development and Gryphon Development, want to refresh and rejuvenate the property.

When completed, Kroll said, the center will have the same number of trees. More shade trees will be added and the center will have improved sight lines from Herndon and Clovis avenues.

Unfortunately, he said, the result is the temporary loss of landscaping.

Mark Kepler, chairman of the Clovis Community Foundation, said he was initially taken aback when he saw the trees chopped down.

He has since spoken with city officials and is hopeful the center will eventually be green again.

But he also is concerned that the city is making sacrifices in the name of improved commerce.

"You have a shopping center that's had some problems, so you're looking at the economic development side, but you also have the quality of life side of it and you have to balance that, too," he said.

Mature trees are more effective at cleaning air than immature trees, he said.

"Whenever you lose mature trees there's a concern in the community," he said. "People in Clovis do take notice and it's a good thing that people are asking questions."

Clovis Council Member Lynne Ashbeck said the Trading Post appears "stark when you drive by," but the new development will have healthier trees that will be more water-efficient.

She said the landscape plan for the shopping center will eventually be an improvement.

Council Member Bob Whalen, comparing it to the early stages of a kitchen renovation when everything is torn out, said he also expects the finished product to look good.

"That parking lot doesn't look good right now, and to the credit of our citizens they take notice, and they're upset about it because they expect the city to look a certain way," he said.

Chris Shane of Gryphon Development said the center is being overhauled, and it may take a few months before signs

of significant progress begin to show.

The city approved the landscaping plan, but “it won’t happen overnight.”

He said the center has been close to empty for years, and he said people didn’t realize there was a shopping center behind the foliage.

“It’s interesting that people are calling about trees being removed, and they weren’t complaining about a shopping center that was 80% vacant with people living in the stores,” he said.

Clovis police said that three people were discovered living in the Save Mart store in May and removed.

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New tenants in shopping center include Sprouts, Ross, Pieology and a Skechers shoe store

“It’s time that the Trading Post becomes a flourishing, positive part of the community,” Shane said. “It hasn’t been that way for a long time.”

About 15,000 square feet of the Save Mart store still needs to be leased, Shane said.

Gryphon Development and Rich Development built the El Paseo Shopping Center at Herndon Avenue and Highway 99.

In Clovis, Rich Development also bought a longtime vacant Vons store at Shaw and Minnewawa avenues in Clovis, which was turned into Burlington Coat Factory in 2013.

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