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Wednesday, May 4, 2005

College Hill neighbors see blossoming future

By Gregory Korte
Enquirer staff writer

The House of Joy choir sang, as did a barbershop quartet. Balloons soared. And 200 people stood in the cold and applauded gleefully as politicians with oversized scissors cut a ceremonial ribbon.

If it seems that College Hill residents are getting a little too excited about new sidewalks, a few streetlights and some flower pots, that's because they see the \$1.5 million streetscape project as just one harbinger of things to come along Hamilton Avenue:

The business district soon will begin taking applications for \$300,000 in city façade grants, which will spruce up about 10 storefronts in the mile-long district along Hamilton Avenue from Llanfair Street to Wittlou Avenue.

Tuesday also marked the opening of the College Hill Farmer's Market, a project of the College Hill Gardeners to sell produce and flowers grown at the Aiken High School greenhouse and other local gardens. It's open Tuesdays from 3-7 p.m. May through October, at Hamilton and Llanfair avenues.

The city has selected a developer for the neighborhood's biggest eyesore: the three vacant corners at the northern end of the district.

Marty Weldishofer, director of the College Hill Community Urban Redevelopment Corp., promised that the developer would break ground on a new retail and housing development at Hamilton Avenue and West North Bend Road by the end of the year.

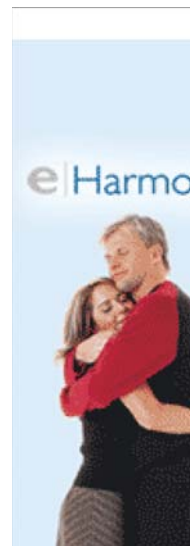
"That means even if I have to supply the party hats and champagne on New Year's Eve and you all have to bring your own shovels," he said.

Gail Paul, a spokeswoman for developer Al Neyer Inc., said groundbreaking this year is possible, but the development hinges on Neyer's ability to buy property from at least four owners.



Tina Stoeberl of College Hill tends one of the new planters on Hamilton Avenue in College Hill. The neighborhood sees its new streetscape - which also includes sidewalks and streetlights - as a harbinger of positive change. The Enquirer/Tony Jones Zoom

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City officials say the corner is one of the top neighborhood development priorities in the city. With a planned \$800,000 city contribution toward the Neyer project, the city investment in the College Hill business district exceeds \$2.5 million.

The new façades are part of a city matching grant program, meaning business owners also have to invest their own money.

"We're not just talking about some awnings and slapping on some paint. What we're hoping is we can get a little competition among the owners," said Phyllis Schoenberger, who's coordinating the program for the neighborhood development group.

City officials say they like the approach.

"What's remarkable about College Hill is that they have a very methodical approach to these development projects. They exhibit patience that other communities don't seem to," said Michael Cervay, director of the Department of Community and Planning. "They joke about it taking five years to get a streetscape, but look around. The proof is in the pudding."

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