

COMMONWEALTH ARCHITECTS AND SMITHER DESIGN

At the intersection of Fifth and Broad streets, the Miller & Rhoads building would be transformed into a 216-room hotel (left foreground) and the Woolworth's building would be demolished to provide an entrance plaza, according to this conceptual rendering.

Farewell to marketplace

It'll make way for ambitious hotel project

BY JEREMY REDMON
TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

Richmond built the 6th Street Marketplace to save downtown. Now city officials want to demolish it for the same reason.

"It was built as a symbol of unity. It has become a symbol of failure and it must come down," said Jack Berry, executive director of Richmond Renaissance.

City officials announced plans to flatten the marketplace yesterday as part of a \$70 million downtown revitalization project.

The plan includes expanding the Richmond Marriott Hotel by 209 rooms from the current 400, turning the Miller & Rhoads building into a 216-room hotel with restaurants and shops, and demolishing the Woolworth's and G.C. Murphy buildings.

An entrance plaza for the hotel at Miller & Rhoads would replace Woolworth's. A park would take the place of G.C. Murphy. And Sixth Street would open back up to motorists once



6th Street Marketplace timeline

- **Feb. 6, 1984:** The city's Planning Commission approves ordinances to include 6th Street Festival Marketplace in downtown redevelopment plans.
- **March 2, 1984:** Two federal grants totaling \$7.7 million are announced. Estimated total cost is \$25 million.
- **April 22, 1984:** Construction begins.
- **June 22, 1984:** City Council votes to add a \$21.5 million bond package to its capital improvements budget for construction of Project One and 6th Street Marketplace.
- **Sept. 18, 1985:** The marketplace opens.
- **Jan. 6, 1990:** Miller & Rhoads closes.
- **Jan. 22, 1992:** Thalhimers closes.
- **Yesterday:** Developer Gary Beller announces plans to demolish the marketplace.

the marketplace is gone. The City Savories food court at 550 E. Marshall St. would remain.

Construction to transform the former Miller & Rhoads department store could begin in 12 to

18 months. No timetable has been set for the marketplace demolition.

The downtown plans will not collect dust, city officials promised yesterday. "We have stud-

ied enough. Now it's a time for action," City Manager Calvin D. Jamison said. "The future of downtown and the convention center depend on it."

On Monday night, City Council endorsed plans for the city to buy the Woolworth's and Miller & Rhoads buildings and associated land for \$3.15 million. The Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority will buy the property on behalf of the city.

The council also agreed to a \$275,000 study of whether Richmond should create a community development authority. Such an authority could sell bonds to pay for public infrastructure near the new convention center.

Certain downtown landowners would pay off the debt on the bonds through a special assessment. And city officials say the authority could reimburse Richmond for the cost of the Miller & Rhoads and Woolworth's properties.

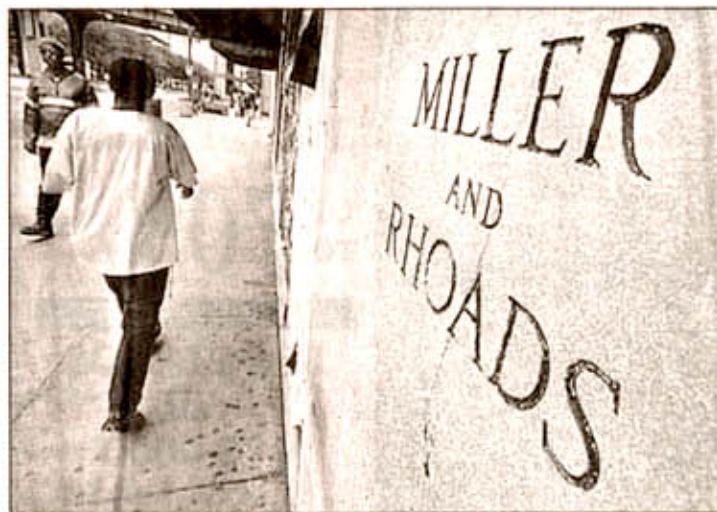
City officials are not planning any direct financial contributions to the project, which could cost as much as \$100 million when demolition and public infrastructure expenses are included.

"We have no choice but to make this a success in order to make the convention center a success," Mayor Rudolph C. McCollum said.

Arts boosters joined the Rich-

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Richmond Times-Dispatch



DEAN HOFFMEYER/TIMES-DISPATCH

The building that bears the name of one of Richmond's former retail anchors will become a different sort of focal point — a hotel with 216 rooms, restaurants and shops.

Downtown

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mond Renaissance meeting yesterday and promoted their own project. They want to establish the Virginia Performing Arts Center in the block that formerly housed the Thalhimers department store.

The center would include an expanded Carpenter Center for the Performing Arts and a new home for TheatreVirginia. It also would be part of a larger downtown arts complex, estimated to cost \$90 million to \$100 million. It is expected to be completed by the fall of 2006.

"It's hand and glove," Brad Armstrong, president of the Virginia Performing Arts Foundation, said about the relationship between the Thalhimers and Miller & Rhoads plans.

The Miller & Rhoads and Thalhimers buildings have been vacant for much of the past decade. Yesterday, a Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority official opened a graffiti-covered door on Seventh Street and let new reporters take a peak inside Thalhimers.

The building was gutted except for its giant white columns, empty jewelry cases and scattered trash. Still, there were plenty of reminders of its past, sections of parquet flooring, boarded-up escalators and signs directing shoppers to the old Soup Bar.

Also at the Renaissance meeting yesterday, city officials introduced Chicago developer Gary A. Beller, president of ECI Investment Advisors Inc. He will guide the Miller & Rhoads and Marri-

ott projects.

Beller announced the plans yesterday to make the marketplace disappear. Tearing it down would potentially open the area up to stores and restaurants fronting on Sixth Street with patio dining, city officials said.

Beller spoke candidly about the marketplace in an interview after the meeting.

"It is economically not successful," Beller said, adding that it would not fit in with his plans for downtown.

The \$25 million marketplace opened on Sept. 18, 1985, with fireworks crackling and hundreds of balloons floating through the air.

Part of what was called Project One, the marketplace was meant to unify blacks and whites as well as rich and poor. It includes a glass-enclosed bridge over Broad

Street, which historically had been the dividing line between the city's black and white communities and financial district and poorer shopping areas.

"The bridge has become a glorified smoking lounge," Berry concluded.

The marketplace was also created to help support the Thalhimers and Miller & Rhoads stores, which closed anyway in the early 1990s.

Richmond is contributing \$1.7 million to pay for the marketplace's operating, debt service, administrative and legal costs this fiscal year. As of Monday, the city will owe \$2.5 million on a loan for the 6th Street Marketplace.

"It was nowhere near the success that we hoped," McCollum said.

The Richmond Festival Marketplace Limited Partnership owns the property. And Richmond's housing authority manages the 176,000-square-foot complex along with a contractor, Advantis.

Twenty-six tenants would be affected by the demolition, including Blue Bone & Leather Hut, which specializes in leather coats.

"What's going to happen to us?" said bewildered store manager Santos Panda. "This area badly needs a mall."

Shoes Etc. manager Edna Henderson agreed.

"Why would you have all of those hotels and have no shops?" she said. "When people come into the city for conventions, they look for somewhere to shop."

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Downtown plans

City officials want to demolish the 6th Street Marketplace, raze Woolworth's and flatten the G.C. Murphy building as part of plans to revitalize downtown. They also plan to convert Miller & Rhoads into a 216-room hotel with restaurants and shops.



TOM ROBERTS/TIMES-DISPATCH