



The latest proposed drawing for a new retail development on Hicks Drive was offered to city officials by Ledbetter Properties representatives in March. / Contributed

Ledbetter Properties expects to close July 1 on its purchase of the old Kmart tract on Hicks Drive. Demolition is slated for Aug. 1.

“We’re going to raze everything,” Wright Ledbetter told the Rome City Commission just before their final vote to create a tax allocation district on the 19.74-acre site.

Ledbetter said plans include tearing up the pavement and ripping out all the water lines and utilities. The idea, he said, is to “rebalance the site” with new utilities, paving, landscaping and buildings.

“There’s a high cost to this, which is why we’re asking for TAD financing,” he said. “It will be about \$650,000 an acre to redevelop.”

With TAD financing, tax increases due to improvements on the property will be funneled back into the project to help offset costs. It’s a mechanism approved by local voters more than a decade ago to encourage re-use of vacant and blighted areas.

The 25 or so stores and restaurants at the new East Bend center will compliment the company's Riverbend center on the opposite side of Turner McCall Boulevard.

Bob Ledbetter confirmed that the anchor stores and restaurants — which are still being kept under wraps — would all be new to Rome. A recent retail trade gap analysis indicated many people go outside the county to shop. He said the mix of businesses they're planning is aimed at recapturing those lost sales.

"This is like landing an industrial project," Commissioner Craig McDaniel said. "It's going to bring in a lot of retail dollars from outside the county"

McDaniel said he's heard concerns that the development would hurt Broad Street businesses, but the offerings at the two areas will be different. And East Bend is expected to need about 400 workers when it's built out.

"It's retail, but those are 400 jobs to replace the ones we've lost," he said. "It's also going to boost our quality of life. The hospital is trying to recruit people, so that's important. This is going to be a huge plus for Rome."

In answer to a question from Commissioner Wendy Davis about the expected increase to traffic, Wright Ledbetter said they have a partial solution.

Some of the development money will go to reworking the stacking lanes on Hicks Drive, to add capacity, he said. They're also adding another right-in-right-out access point to the site.

There's 190,000 square feet of (now vacant) retail space on the site, he noted, and they're going to cut that down to 100,000 square feet. But there will be more businesses.

"We hope the traffic infrastructure will be sufficient, but it probably will ... 'enhance the congestion,'" he said with a smile. "When you're bringing new businesses to an area, that's going to be a reality."

Mayor Bill Collins praised the Ledbetters' previous projects in the city — most recently, RiverWalk center on Riverside Parkway — and other commissioners added their confidence in the company's work.

"That fact that we've got hometown developers taking on this project is very important and a bonus," Commissioner Jamie Doss said. "The ripple effect will benefit us all."

The Ledbetters still need to get TAD approval from the Floyd County Commission, but board members have separately indicated they would support an intergovernmental agreement with the city.

Diane Wagner