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Eastland Mall street work delayed

City says a developer would tear up the work anyway, but residents see the decision as a snub on a neglected area.

By Julia Oliver
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Charlotte has indefinitely postponed a \$4 million streetscape project near Eastland Mall because of uncertainty over the shopping center's future.

The sidewalk, curb and landscaping work was scheduled to begin next year along Central Avenue, near the intersection with Albemarle Road. Officials said they do not want to put money toward work that could be torn up later, if a developer redesigns the Eastland property.

"We just didn't want to go ahead with a road project when we don't know what's going on with the mall," said Keith Carpenter, the project manager supervising the streetscape work.

A streetcar is also planned for the avenue, and Tom Flynn, the city's economic development director, said that influenced the decision.

"We'd tear up the street again to put streetcar tracks down," he said.

The area is the focus of some of the city's biggest redevelopment dreams. Eastland Mall, a once-regional shopping center, has declined in the last decade. It has lost about a quarter of its tenants since it opened in the 1970s, and three of its four anchors have either rented out space, closed or converted to a discount center.

Officials hope that a private developer will replace the mall with a mix of housing and retail shopping. In a bid to influence that, the city this year purchased options on the Belk and Dillard's properties – two of five parcels on the 70-acre site.

The deal shows no sign of quick resolution. The company that owns the majority of the mall land, Glimcher Realty Trust, announced in July that it would walk away from its mortgage. A September deadline for a balloon payment of \$42 million has come and gone. The company is still in discussions with its lender, said Flynn.

East Charlotte residents, who frequently complain that the city doesn't pay enough attention to their side of town, are watching the project carefully. Some said Thursday that the streetscape deferral is just another sign of neglect.

"It's really just ... another example of the city telling us, 'Help is on the way. Just wait,'" said Ed

Garber, who heads the Eastside Political Action Committee.

Darrell Bonapart, chairman of a group of eastside neighborhood associations, said he wanted to know why streetscaping work is related to the mall's ownership.

"I didn't feel that one had anything to do with the other," he said.




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