



## City Architecture design for Collinwood recreation center scores green points

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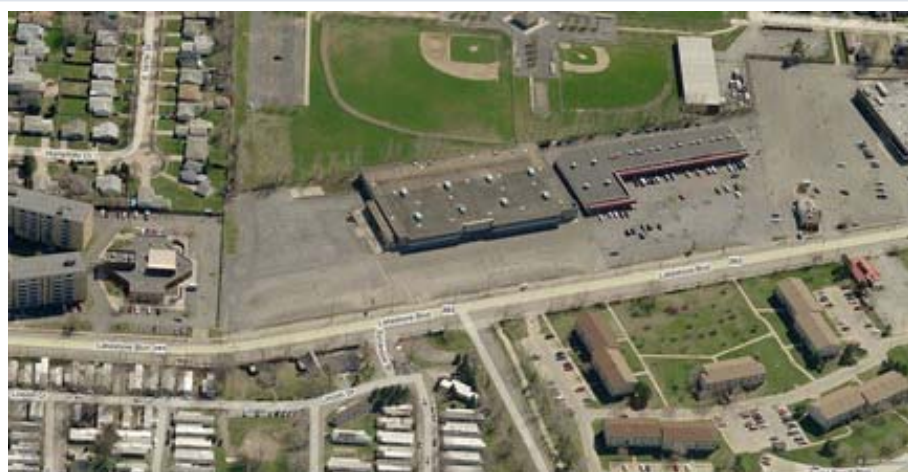
City Architecture

Tree-shaded walks will lead to the entry of the proposed Collinwood Recreation Center. Northeast Ohio is littered with dead malls and empty big box stores, killed by changing fads in retail and the kooky race to add more suburban shopping to a region that isn't growing in population.

So what's a city to do with an dead box? Recycle it.

That's what Cleveland proposes to do with a long vacant former K-Mart and Big Lots store on Lakeshore Boulevard, just north of Humphrey Park in North Collinwood.

The \$10.8 million project, which the city expects to put out for bids next month, promises to turn an eyesore into an anchor to aid revitalization of a feisty urban neighborhood with fine assets including a burgeoning arts district and a pair of lakefront parks.



Courtesy City of Cleveland

Plans for the Collinwood recreation center call for demolition of part of the 68,000-square-foot former Big Lots store. The rec center will be 45,000 square feet.

The store merits rebirth not because of its drab original design, but because of its location. It was built in the 1960s on the south side of Lakeshore Boulevard, opposite the former Euclid Beach amusement park, now filled with subsidized, low-income apartments in the newly renovated Lakeshore Beach complex.

Just north and east of the apartments lie Cleveland Lakefront State Park and Wildwood State Park, which together boast "more linear feet of beach than anywhere else in Northeast Ohio," said Brian Friedman, director of the Northeast Shores Community Development Corporation.

To the south of the old Big Lots store lies Humphrey Park, a 30-acre city facility with five baseball diamonds.

It's the perfect spot for a community center, as former mayor Jane Campbell recognized in 2005 when she committed to buy the property and re-use it for recreation.

Unfortunately, residents have had to wait since then for the administration of Mayor Frank Jackson to finish designs and reject a request from Councilman Roosevelt Coats, who wanted a new recreation center built in neighboring South Collinwood.

"I have five kids," said Councilman Mike Polensek, who represents North Collinwood. "My older kids never had a chance to use a rec center. Was I disappointed? Yes."

But the councilman said the design has been worth the wait.

"This could be the driving force to revitalize and reinvigorate Lakeshore Boulevard," he said.



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A computer rendering shows a bird's eye view of how the Collinwood recreation center will look in the future. It's easy to understand the councilman's excitement, because on paper, the plans look quite good. Designed by City Architecture of Cleveland, the project will include a gymnasium, a natatorium with play pools, a four-lane lap pool, a large water slide, an aerobics studio, a fitness room, a learning center and community meeting spaces.

The project is intended to exemplify the Jackson administration's new push on sustainability. Paul Volpe, City Architecture's design principal, aims to capture a Gold rating under the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED program, short for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. Gold is the second highest of four levels.

The project will include state-of-the-art plumbing, recycled concrete, lots of natural light, plus high-tech monitoring equipment to keep energy costs low. The gymnasium will have a bamboo floor, considered optimal because bamboo is durable and renewable alternative to old growth hardwoods.

Landscaping will include a generously proportioned rain garden, intended to capture and filter runoff from the center's 200-space parking lot.

"We shouldn't be dumping anything in the sewers," Volpe said.



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The floor plan of the Collinwood recreation center offers a look inside the facility, to be inserted inside an old Big Lots store starting in 2010. In addition to green design, the project is part of a national trend toward "big box reuse," documented in book with the same title published last year by Oberlin College Visiting Professor Julia Christensen.

In words and photographs, Christensen showed how communities across the country are turning abandoned big box stores into justice centers, indoor go-cart raceways, daycare centers, charter schools, libraries and churches.

The trend has gone largely unnoticed by architecture critics, perhaps because examples in the book featured big boxes redecorated with kitschy, faux-classical facades.

Volpe's design is more high-concept. He's cleaning and reusing a folded metal canopy that will make the upper portion of the building's main facade resemble a giant, stretched out accordion.

In addition to this bit of 60's-era styling, Volpe will modify the original flat roofs with a sloped roof over the natatorium and a gable roof with a skylight monitor over the gym. Metal panels on the facades will be finished in colors including a goldenrod yellow, a soft, earthy gray and a weathered blue intended to evoke nearby Lake Erie.

The project will be financed by the city through general obligation bonds, which makes it a self-help effort at producing jobs in a recession. Construction, which will take about 14 months, should begin in the first half of 2010, said Ken Silliman, the mayor's chief of staff.

Cleveland could do with more projects like this. Recycling an empty store as a recreation center could help at least one corner of the city hang on to existing residents and attract new ones. It shows how smart design can aid a larger recycling project - that of Cleveland as a whole.