

Highline Times

TUESDAY MARCH 20, 2007 Last modified: Tuesday, October 17, 2006 9:18 PM PDT

Ceremony starts construction

By Sara Loken

On a sunny fall afternoon, local lawmakers and supporters of Burien's Town Square joined together in an Oct. 10 groundbreaking for the multi-million dollar project.

Wielding ceremonial sledgehammers, Burien, state and federal officials tore down a wall at the old Puget Sound Educational Services District building at Southwest 152nd Street and Fourth Avenue Southwest.



Burien Deputy Mayor Jack Block Jr. takes a whack at a wall to mark the beginning of Town Square construction as interim city manager David Cline and others look on. Photo by Amber Trillo

Following demolition of the structure, a new Burien City Hall/King County Regional Library facility will be built there.

U.S. Sen. Patty Murray congratulated the city on its efforts to push the project through.

"You were successful because you had a vision, you worked together, and you never gave up," said Murray, a Democrat. "Burien's best days are ahead of us."

Communication at the ceremony was all praise for the city for following through with the project.

Dan Rosenfeld, principal of Urban Partners LLC, the private developer for Town Square, said the city did everything right.

"Someday this will be known as the Burien model," Rosenfeld predicted.

Burien Mayor Joan McGilton thanked everyone for being patient while watching the project go through.

"It's been amazing to see a vision like this last for 13 years," said U.S. Rep. Jim McDermott, D-7.

The city and its partners in the project, the King County Library District and Urban Partners, will invest \$138 million to create Town Square.

It will include 41,000 square feet of open public space for community gatherings and events at the center of the development.

Town Square also will include the new city hall/regional library, about 43,000 square feet of new retail space that will bring about 200 new jobs downtown, and approximately 400 high-quality condominiums and town houses.

However, the skies were not so sunny for the Strobel sisters, whose Burien restaurant property has been

condemned by the city to make way for a street as part of the Town Square project.

Immediately following the groundbreaking ceremony, Robin Oldfelt, a managing partner of Strobel Family Investments, and their attorneys held a press conference outside Meal Makers restaurant.

Despite the struggle to keep their property, the vision of Town Square is something the owners support, Oldfelt said. They just want to be a part of it.

"We're not against Town Square," Oldfelt said. "The main thing has been difficulty for elected council member to sit down and talk with us."

Burien condemned the property in 2005 under the city's power of eminent domain after council members determined that a road through the restaurant site constituted a public use of the land.

Oldfelt claims that early Town Square plans didn't have the road going through their property and only "side swiped" it. "Planners later made sure that the road went right through, she said.

"It (Meal Makers) doesn't fit the vision ... so they (the city) put a street through it," said Michael Bindas, an attorney with Institute for Justice, which represents the Strobel sisters.

A petition was filed with the State Supreme Court in August asking that the case be heard and the condemnation of the property be reversed.

"No Washington citizen should lose their property to the government wrecking ball," said Bindas, who added that the Strobels had made an offer to the city to make their property blend better visually with the Town Square design.

But, interim City Manager David Cline told the Times/News in a letter last week, "The Burien community envisioned having a road and a park as part of Town Square."

Lower courts, Cline said, "have unanimously agreed with the City in this matter ... reaffirming that the community's elected representatives are given the authority to decide what is the best option to meet the community's needs."

He noted "the city worked with the Strobel family for three years to try to find a solution that met everyone's goals."

Oldfelt disagreed. "We haven't been able to communicate with the city. The city of Burien absolutely would not stop."