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Santa Monica Daily Press

Since 2001: A news odyssey

THE OUT AND ABOUT ISSUE

DEVELOPMENT

RAZING THE ROOF

Santa Monica Place's renovation to include outdoor dining deck
STORY PAGE 12



Rendering courtesy of Macerich



Fabian Lewkowicz fabianl@smdp.com

I'M DYNAMITE: Music Director Joe De Sa, left, teaches Aidon Ross, 6, and Brian Clemens, 12, AC/DC's classic "TNT."

PARENTING

Kids powered by AC/DC

School of Rock gives kids the opportunity to perform live

BY MELODY HANATANI
Daily Press Staff Writer

OLYMPIC BLVD. — The walls vibrated in the small recording studio on Saturday as a 15-year-old kid with flowing locks cradled his electric guitar and strummed the familiar chords that begin AC/DC's "Thunderstruck."

To the left of him sat an even younger rocker, banging on a set of drums and thrashing his head back and forth, back and forth. Out in front was a young boy, slowly singing: "I

was caught ... In the middle of a railroad track."

The legends of rock 'n' roll past line the walls, with posters of Jimi Hendrix, Kurt Cobain and David Bowie leading to the recording studio, each singer providing the students with inspiration. A "Rock and Roll Street" sign informs visitors that they've reached their destination.

Welcome to the real-life version of the School of Rock, actor Jack Black excluded.

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Rendering courtesy of Macerich

BIG CHANGES: The interior of Santa Monica Place will become an open-air shopping mall in the current batch of design proposals. Currently, the mall has an enclosed shopping concourse.

Santa Monica Place won't be recognizable after work

BY KEVIN HERRERA
Daily Press Staff Writer

SANTA MONICA PLACE Macerich Co. is ready to tear the roof off this mother.

Executives with the Santa Monica-based real estate giant say they will submit a formal application today to renovate and revitalize the mother of all disharmonious shopping centers, with plans to remove the roof along its central spine and create an open-air, multilevel complex that makes use of the cool ocean breezes and better connects with the Third Street Promenade, Santa Monica Pier and Civic Center.

The parking structures, with just under 2,000 spaces, would remain open throughout construction, as would Macy's, but the remaining stores would be forced to shut their doors. Officials hope to break ground in early 2008, with completion set for fall 2009.

Macerich is looking to retain the current scale and work within the original Santa Monica Place's footprint and height limits, featuring just three stories. The top floor will include a new food court.

"Here we are in Southern California and we have a closed, suburban shopping center. What is that doing for Santa Monica?" Robert Aptaker, Macerich's vice president of development, asked on Monday, alluding to the day's warm temperatures and clear, sunny skies.

"We're going to tear off the roof and create an open-air environment with great public spaces, great views, ocean breezes and that fits within the character of what Santa Monica really is," Aptaker said.

The "adaptive reuse" plan comes just over two years after the City Council asked Macerich — one of the nation's largest retail real estate investment trusts with 73 regional shopping centers in its portfolio — to abandon plans that called for the demolition of the mall and replacing it with three, 21-story towers that would have included offices, retail and housing.

■ Build something of reasonable scale, in line with Santa Monica's aesthetic sensibilities;

- Create a better connection with the promenade;
- Include open-air, views and street-retail elements;
- Develop an environmentally sound project;
- Make retail the primary use at the mall;
- Pay attention to traffic and parking.

"We are so pleased with all the feedback from the community," said Robyn Young, senior manager of development relations for Macerich.

I THINK WHAT WE ARE BRINGING FORWARD TODAY REALLY REFLECTS THE COMMUNITY'S INTERESTS AND VALUES."

Robyn Young, senior manager of development relations for Macerich

Residents and elected officials felt that proposal was out-of-step with the community and were concerned about traffic impacts in an already congested downtown.

Admitting they made a mistake, Macerich officials last summer met with community members in a series of 14 meetings and used their input to craft a dramatically different concept that incorporates these six key requirements identified by residents:

"I think what we are bringing forward today really reflects the community's interests and values."

City Hall is co-hosting an "open-house" with Macerich on March 15 to give residents a detailed look at the proposal. It will be the first of many community meetings as part of the permitting process. In addition to going before the council for approval, Macerich will also present the plan to several commissions, including the Planning and Coastal commissions.



Rendering courtesy of Macerich



Daniel Archuleta daniela@smdp.com

BEFORE AND AFTER: Top; An artist's rendering of the Broadway side of Santa Monica Place following an extensive renovation. The plan is still in the development phase. Above; A photo from the very same perspective of the mall as it stands today.

City Manager Lamont Ewell said he was impressed with the way in which Macerich involved the community as it went back to the drawing board.

"This seems to be reflecting what this community said it was more interested in seeing, so I'm happy they have dealt with it in this manner," Ewell said. "But ultimately, the council will have to look at this objectively and decide if it meets the needs of the city."

As far as experts in retail are concerned, a renovated Santa Monica Place is a necessity when talking about the economic vitality of the city.

When the Frank Gehry-designed mall opened in 1980, it was a crown jewel of retail with its glass-ceiling, waterfall and other decorative touches, however, as the years passed, the mall, purchased by Macerich in 1999, had become outdated when compared to the new "lifestyle" shopping centers that combined retail with housing for a more urban feel, much like the promenade.

"(Santa Monica Place) definitely needs to be upgraded. It's kind of dumpy," said George Whalin, founder of Retail Management Consultants.

A renovated mall would likely attract more shoppers, helping Santa Monica remain competitive with newly renovated malls in Century City and West Los Angeles.

That means more sales tax revenue to fund city projects

and services, Whalin said.

"There is a massive population on that side of town that does not want to drive west of the 405 (Freeway) who could be served by a new shopping center," Whalin said. "A renovation will be good for both the stores, the shoppers and the community."

Macerich is looking to attract an eclectic mix of retailers and restaurants to better serve residents, who have asked for more affordable options, particularly when it comes to everyday wear.

"Even with the great retail on Main Street, Montana (Avenue) and the Third Street Promenade, there is still a lot we can do to service the needs of residents," Young said.

Diana Gordon, a co-founder of the Santa Monica Coalition for a Livable (SMCLC), which sued City Hall to gain access to communications between city staff and Macerich during the first proposal, praised the mall operator for reaching out to residents the second time around, but also put Macerich on notice that they will continue to be monitored throughout the process.

"That is music to a lot of residents' ears," Gordon said of the new concept. "There are still some open issues, such as what type of environmental review the city will require ... but the process has opened up dramatically."

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