

## New life for downtown?

Whittier Daily News, The (CA)-November 1, 2007  
Author: Mike Sprague, Staff Writer

---

WHITTIER - Years of frustration with the blighted former Alpha Beta property began to ease on Thursday.  
Using sledgehammers, city officials, merchants and others each took a swing or two at the building.

It was all part of a ceremony to celebrate the coming demolition of the property.

"I was letting out frustrations," said Whittier Councilman Joe Vinatieri, who actually knocked off parts of the cinder block planter.

"I was swinging with delight with what's going to happen there," Vinatieri said.

"I see today as the beginning of the renaissance of Uptown Whittier," he said. "We're excited about the developer's plans. Whittier is on the move."

The City Council in September selected HDS Group of Beverly Hills to develop the 3.4-acre property along Hadley Street between Comstock and Milton avenues.

The company has proposed two plans - one with a library and one without. Both also would include retail space and new homes.

The council at its Oct. 9 meeting awarded a \$227,000 contract to Balandra Demolition of San Bernardino to demolish the Alpha Beta store, former U.S. Bank and commercial strip on the property.

The company already has begun removing asbestos from the Alpha Beta. The former bank is expected to come down in a few days with everything expected to be demolished in 45 days, said Jeff Collier, director of community development.

Whittier Mayor Owen Newcomer was ecstatic.

"This place will be flat territory by the time we celebrate the New Year," Newcomer said.

"We're going to see great things here," he said. "It's a kickoff signature project that redevelops and revives Uptown."

The demolition can't come too soon for Jeff Langan, secretary of the Whittier Uptown Association and owner of the former Whittier Paint and Wallpaper.

"It's great, but they've taken long to do it," Langan said.

"It should have been done 10 years ago," he said. "However, the city does everything in its own time. This is a meaningful accomplishment. It'll be a shot in the arm for the town."

The property once was the site of the former Jonathan Bailey School, said Candace Holley-Netland, collections manager for the Whittier Museum. The playground was located where the former Alpha Beta now stands.

The Alpha Beta store opened in 1962 and was closed in 1993. The city purchased the Alpha Beta in March 2000 and the rest of the property during the next two years.

"I remember the long negotiations to acquire the property to get it away from the property owner because Alpha Beta wanted to hang on to it to make sure nobody came here and competed with their new store," Councilman Bob Henderson said.

He was referring to the store - now a Ralphs - in the Whittier Marketplace.

For others, the demolition of the Alpha Beta was sad.

"It's kind of a hurt," said Joan Snyder of Whittier, who lived nearby during the 1980s.

"I had small children and it was like my home away from home," Snyder said. "I can't believe this place is going."

Vinatieri, too, had memories of the store opening, recalling when Engineer Bill was there.

"Some of you remember Engineer Bill on TV with his red light, green light," he said. "Engineer Bill came here and opened it up. We all got to play red light, green light as little kids."

---

[mike.sprague@sgvn.com](mailto:mike.sprague@sgvn.com) - (562) 698-0955, Ext. 3022

Section: News - Record Number: 7346519

(c) 2007 The Whittier Daily News. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Media NewsGroup, Inc. by NewsBank, Inc.