

Developer plans N. High St. revival

Saturday November 15, 2014 5:02 AM

dispatch.com

An area along N. High Street referred to as Death Valley because of empty stores and lack of development is getting a makeover and could soon come back to life.

The Day Cos. has bought three buildings at 72-84 N. High St. for an undisclosed amount, including the long-vacant former Madison's store building and the White-Haines Building.

"We are very excited about redeveloping them," said Ricky Day, principal at Day Cos. "We're just getting started and are in the planning stages and hopefully, down the road, will be able to share more details."

The buyer owns several other buildings on the east side of N. High near these three buildings, plus properties on Gay Street between High and 3rd streets.

"I just believe in these streets and the Downtown," Day said.

Cleve Ricksecker is the one who called the area Death Valley.

"What's so encouraging about this is the Day Cos. understand how to attract retail. They get it," said Ricksecker, executive director of the Capital Crossroads Special Improvement District.

He said he believes this area of N. High Street is poised for the type of retail and residential growth that has occurred around the corner on Gay Street and in other areas of Downtown.

For example, the Edwards Co. plans to convert the former Citizens Savings and Trust building on the southwest corner of High and Gay streets and an empty lot on the northwest corner of that intersection into residential units.

"There's a very specific type of retail Downtown right now — startups and independent stores," Ricksecker said. "The chains are not interested, and the startups and independents have specific needs: affordable space with a lot of consumer traffic and the need to be clustered with other startups and independents."

All three buildings bought by the Day Cos. have empty storefronts on the first floor and vacant offices above.

City inspectors ruled in July that the three buildings were unsafe to occupy, finding that they had structural damage, water damage, collapsed ceilings and no heat. Their fire-suppression systems weren't working, either. They were previously owned by the Tonti Organization.

Crews from Day Cos. are working on the buildings.

"It's more exploratory right now," Day said. "We're trying to get an idea of what the facades look like."

The Madison's at 72 N. High St. was once the flagship store of the long-gone chain. It closed in 1992 and has been vacant since 1995.

The six-story White-Haines Building at 82 N. High St. was built in 1913, and the exterior features glazed terra cotta. The concrete frame allowed the use of windows larger than those found in nearby buildings built with masonry during that period, according to the AIA Guide to Columbus.

"Those buildings could use some attention and some care," said Stephen Wittmann, chairman of the Downtown Commission. "They've been vacant for a long time."

Any changes to the facades would need the approval of the Downtown Commission.

Wittmann is also optimistic that the Day Cos. will improve the area.

"They have shown us they have a nice design sense, and they seem to find good tenants for their buildings," he said.

swartenberg@dispatch.com