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Commons will bring to life history of steel

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Plain Dealer Reporter

The brawny, blue-collar history of steel is likely to be a part of the retail and restaurant mix at the planned Steelyard Commons shopping center in Cleveland.

Developer First Interstate Development Co. Ltd. of Lyndhurst says it has moved an aging, red brick building close to the center's proposed northern entrance, off Quigley Road. The building, with a distinctive peaked roof, will afford 600 square feet for displays about the steel industry that once thrummed on the sprawling site, below Jennings Freeway.

As proposed, the building would sit only a few strides from the planned extension of the Towpath Trail through Steelyard Commons. It would also be near a proposed stop on the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad, which plans to push its rail line into downtown Cleveland.

Plans for the steel exhibit emerged Monday from a meeting of the Industrial Heritage Committee, formed last fall at the urging of the Cleveland Landmarks Commission.

The razing of steel mill buildings to make way for Steelyard Commons, as well as the demolition of a West Side blast furnace, roused concerns last year that remnants of the Cuyahoga Valley's steel heritage were being destroyed without full evaluation of their significance.

Committee members include representatives from the Western Reserve Historical Society, city of Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Ohio Canal Corridor, Mittal Steel USA and the National Park Service.

Ten committee members heard First Interstate report that the 110-ton, red brick building, which once housed steel mill offices, had been jacked up from its foundation and moved 1,500 feet by trailer.

Committee members already are discussing steel-making displays and exhibits that would fill the building by the time the shopping center opens sometime late next year.

It would join a number of historic and educational displays and stops along the Towpath Trail, a multi-county, hike-and-bike path that runs from Zoar in Tuscarawas County to Harvard Road in Cleveland.

"We'd want people to spend a little bit of time here, in a focused way," said Ed Pershey, of the Western Reserve Historical Society.

First Interstate is also planning a playground with a steel mill motif and wants to integrate remnants of the nearby mill, including a giant crane and a utility bridge, into its steel-themed shopping center.

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