

The Capital

Developers break ground on large city apartment complex

By JEFF HORSEMAN, Staff Writer

Annapolis Mayor Ellen O. Moyer joined developers, officials and civic leaders yesterday in breaking ground on a 300-unit apartment complex that could herald the rebirth of outer West Street.

Despite the optimism about Westbridge Village at the intersection with Chinquapin Round Road, at least one community leader is worried about mounting traffic stemming from large development projects at Parole's outer ends.

The \$50 million Westbridge Village will replace the closed J.F. Johnson Lumber Co. at the site. The company moved to Edgewater last year, creating an unprecedented 6.54-acre redevelopment site near Annapolis' western edge.

The 300 apartments will be housed in three, four-story buildings, two of which will front West Street. There will be roughly 20,000 square feet of ground-floor retail space in two buildings.

Washington-based firms Union Realty Partners and Wood Partners are developing Westbridge Village. Union Realty President Stephen Muller said the apartments will cater to young professionals and empty nesters.

Ms. Moyer and Alderwoman Classie G. Hoyle, D-Ward 3, hopes Westbridge signals a wave of redevelopment around outer West Street, now dominated by car dealerships, banks and fast-food franchises.

Parole's representative on the City Council, Mrs. Hoyle said Westbridge's housing will bring activity to an area rendered dormant once businesses close for the night. The site long ago was a sandlot, something noted on a

Parole Heritage Trail marker unveiled at yesterday's groundbreaking.

The main criticism of Westbridge centers on traffic. The apartments will go at an intersection that saw 34,000 vehicles a day in 2002, according to State Highway Administration figures.

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Mr. Muller has repeatedly said the project won't worsen congestion. Developers agreed to add a right-turn lane from West Street to Chinquapin and a left-turn lane from Chinquapin to West.

The project will also coordinate the intersection's traffic signals with the adjacent West Street-Admiral Drive intersection.

"Traffic was a problem before this development got here," Mrs. Hoyle said.

While he praised Westbridge for creating jobs and more retail stores, the Rev. Johnny R. Calhoun of nearby Mount Olive AME Church is concerned that the project, along with the massive Annapolis Town Centre planned for Parole's other end, could create further transportation headaches.

"There are no answers for the traffic right now," said the Rev. Calhoun, who gave an invocation at the groundbreaking.

The challenge, he said, will be to preserve Parole's vitality in the face of the ongoing development.

Demolition of the site's existing buildings is expected to begin in the next few weeks. Construction is scheduled to take 22 months.