Development could spark Main Street retail

BY RUDOLPH BELL • STAFF WRITER • PUBLISHED: MAY 26, 2011 2:00AM

The headquarters of a new bank intent on growing and a women's fashion boutique usually reserved for larger markets are among the firms that will take space in a $100 million development unveiled Wednesday for the middle of Main Street.

CertusBank said it expects to have more than 350 employees in the headquarters over time, while Greenville officials hope the Anthropologie store will draw more shopping and thus meet their long-held goal of diversifying downtown's retail mix beyond its many restaurants and bars.

Gov. Nikki Haley joined developer Bob Hughes for the announcement and said the development, called One, underscores why more and more South Carolinians want to move to Greenville.

Haley told reporters that the "conversation has shifted" among young people.

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"They no longer are saying, 'I want to live in Charleston one day.' They're now saying, 'I want to live in Greenville when I grow up.' They're now saying, 'I'm looking for a time to move to Greenville,'" Haley said.

"That's a great sign that Main Street Greenville is becoming really a magnet for young people, for older people, for retirees and for companies. Greenville is doing something right. We're going to keep on helping them do it."

Denver architect Randy Johnson pulled a cover off an easel to reveal his firm's design to hundreds of people gathered under and around a tent in the middle of Piazza Bergamo, the public plaza at the intersection of Main and Coffee streets that is next door to the development site.

One will consist of a nine-story office tower joined to a 10- or 11-story office tower by 40,000 to 50,000 square feet of retail space at the street level. The two-phase development will front Main Street between Washington Street and Piazza Bergamo.

Hughes has said he expects to break ground in July and may build both phases at once. He's talking to potential tenants for phase two, the larger tower. The Haynsworth Sinkler Boyd law firm is taking two floors in the smaller tower.

Johnson said pedestrians at Piazza Bergamo will be able to see through glass walls into the shops at street level and office space on floors five through nine of the smaller tower. He said the roof of the tower's fourth floor will be covered by a garden as large as 5,000 square feet.

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"The intention here is to create a really lively edge for the piazza so you have life during the day and at night as well," said Johnson, a principal with 4240 Architecture Inc.

The 6,400-square-foot Anthropologie store will occupy a "point" position overlooking the plaza. The chain, owned by Urban Outfitters Inc. of Philadelphia, sells clothes, shoes, bags, jewelries and accessories.

John Millar, a Virginia Beach real estate consultant working with Hughes, said Anthropologie initially resisted his call to put one of its 12,000-square-foot stores at One because the chain wasn't sure Greenville was big enough to support it.

He said Anthropologie agreed to come, however, after deciding to launch smaller prototype stores in "secondary markets."

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Millar said he sent Anthropologie lots of information about downtown Greenville, including an article published in the US Airways magazine and the ZIP codes of people who bought tickets to the "Wicked" show at the Peace Center to show downtown's regional draw.

"We pulled out all the stops," said Millar, executive vice president of Divaris Real Estate Inc.

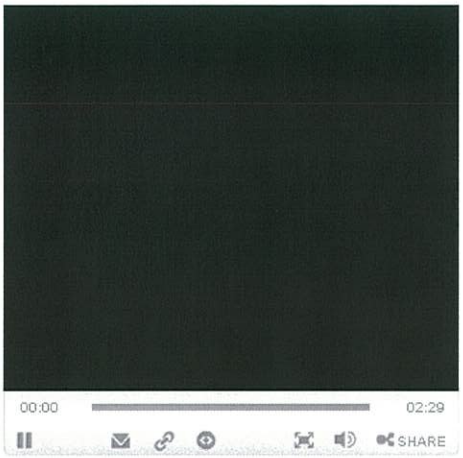
"Because of everything we had given them, once they decided to try a smaller prototype in secondary markets, Greenville was at the top of their list."

Millar said it helped that one of Anthropologie's real estate brokers in Nashville had visited downtown Greenville for a wedding last year and been impressed.

City of Greenville officials have set aside $4 million to redesign Piazza Bergamo and make other public improvements in conjunction with the development.

Mayor Knox White has said the improvements may include streetscape work on Coffee and North Laurens streets and better access to the city parking garage on Richardson Street.

White said the city has long viewed the development site, nearly an entire city block, as "the last best chance to bring destination retail to downtown." White said he figures that opportunity has been realized with the



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arrival of Anthropologie.

A mix of commercial and residential uses is key to downtown's vitality, White said, and recruiting anchor retailers has been one of the biggest challenges in the city's longtime push to revitalize downtown.

"We want a mix of activities downtown for downtown's sustainability," he said. "It can't be just about entertainment alone. It can't be just about office. It needs to be all three. And the retail environment is always challenging. It's always the last to return to downtown."

Helen Sanders, a project manager with Hughes' company, Hughes Development, and the developer's daughter, said CertusBank will take 6,000 square feet of the retail space for a branch.

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