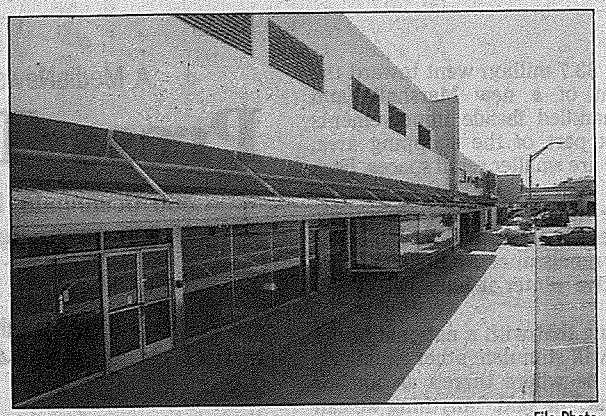
Out with the old and in with the new



File Photo

The former Roberts Department Store in Bixby Knolls, which has been closed nearly 15 years, had become a tagger's target. It will be demolished Thursday and will become a Marshalls store next year.

RETAIL: Roberts Department Store to come down to make way for Marshalls.

By Karen Robes Meeks
Staff Writer

LONG BEACH — For nearly 15 years, the building that housed the former Roberts Department Store was a glaring vacancy in the heart of Bixby Knolls' commercial district.

Now, the 52,000-square-foot building at 4450 Atlantic Ave., will finally come down to make

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way for another department store.

The Long Beach Redevelopment Agency, 8th District City Councilwoman Rae Gabelich and the Bixby Knolls Business Improvement Association on Thursday will witness the demolition of the building, which is being cleared for a new Marshalls Department Store, expected to open by fall 2010.

"We're pretty excited to finally see this breaking ground and moving forward," said Long Beach Development Services Director Craig Beck.

Roberts, a shopping destination for families seeking their Sunday best, occupied the Bixby Knolls location for 28 years before its closure. The building, considered by some to be an example of mid-century architecture, had become run down and tagged with graffiti.

Many in the community wondered if anything would be done about the building.

"Since I've been here the last few years, the feedback from the neighborhood has been, 'What's the status? When's it going to be taken care of?'" said Blair Cohn, executive director of the association.

For four years, the agency has been working with the developer and property owner, Gaska Inc., to try to reactivate the commercial space, Beck said.

To help do that, the agency approved a $4.2 million loan that would accomplish two things: $3.7 million went toward the development of a new Marshalls and $500,000 handled facade improvements to the back part of the shopping area, where there are smaller retail spaces, Beck said.

For those in the business community, the improvements help further "the slow and gentle renaissance of Bixby Knolls" into the active center it once was, Cohn said.

"I'm hoping that with a national brand like that, it will stimulate other (retailers) to want to be where there's an anchor store like that," he said. "Anything we can do to keep moving forward and show progress is a positive."

The demolition will take place at 10 a.m. Thursday at 4450 Atlantic Ave.

karen.robes@presstelegram.com, 562-499-1303