

Dahlia demolition underway at last

After several false starts, redevelopment of the black-owned shopping center begins with a year-long razing and cleanup.

By Kristi Arellano
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Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper and Councilwoman Elbra Wedgeworth were at the controls Wednesday as the Dahlia Square shopping center took its most visible step toward redevelopment.

With city officials and community members cheering, the pair guided a giant orange excavator that tore a car-sized gash in the roof of the dilapidated center.

"This is a monumental day for northeast Denver and the city of Denver," Wedgeworth said at the ceremony, which kicked off a year-long demolition and environmental cleanup of the 8.3-acre site. It was once among the largest black-owned shopping centers in the country.

Efforts to revitalize Dahlia Square have previously endured false starts, including a deal that fell apart in 2003 when a landfill was discovered beneath the site.

The nonprofit Parkhill Community Inc. has since purchased the site and is handling the remediation with a combination of city and federal funding. The Denver Urban Renewal Authority will select a developer to take over the site when cleanup is completed.

The developer must build at least 150 units of attached and detached housing, as well as senior housing, a health clinic and a commercial center.

Alliance Development Partners, a group led by former Mayor Wellington Webb and developer Jim Sullivan, is the only group that remains in the running.

DURA has asked Alliance to clarify a "number of issues" with its site plan, said



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Denver City Councilwoman Elbra Wedgeworth and Mayor John Hickenlooper are all smiles after they got to manipulate the controls of an excavator and ceremonially begin demolition of the old Dahlia Square shopping center Wednesday.

DURA executive director Tracy Huggins. She declined to specify what sort of issues DURA has with Alliance's plan.

If the group can successfully resolve DURA's issues at a meeting Sept. 30, it will be selected for the project. Otherwise, a new developer will be chosen, Huggins said.

Redevelopment of the site dogged Webb during his tenure as mayor, and he faced criticism from black community leaders for what they deemed slow progress.

"It's great that they're finally doing it," said Callie Oliver, who has lived in Park Hill since 1962 and recalled when Dahlia

Square was a vibrant area with a grocery store. "They need to go ahead and get it done. I don't want to wait another five years."

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