

## Ridgeland eyes city center

**RIDGELAND** — Reviving parts of the aging U.S. 51 corridor, easing traffic congestion and creating a city center are among the projects on Ridgeland's agenda this year.

Oak Place Center, located on U.S. 51, started a renovation project that will cost more than \$500,000. It's made possible by a partnership with the Mississippi Development Authority and the Central Mississippi Planning & Development Division.

Mayor Gene McGee was on hand for the kickoff day last week.

"I'm very excited about this project coming to fruition," he said. "I look forward to the day that we get to enjoy 100 percent occupancy in a revitalized shopping center."

Last fall, the shopping center was bought out of foreclosure. A late-night fire at a beauty salon left part of Oak Place burned. The shopping center is 20 percent occupied.

Owner Bob Buchanan is expected to put a new facade on the building, adding updated architectural features. The project is starting with foundation repair. Repaving the parking lot, landscaping, lighting and signage will be done at the end of the year.

The project received a \$50,000 grant from MDA, and Buchanan will fund the rest.

Across U.S. 51, the empty and rotting Log Village shopping center recently was demolished.

Land owner Trustmark National Bank has no redevelopment plans as of now, "but removing these structures will certainly improve the marketability of the site," said Alan Hart, the city's community development director.

Two other current projects are the City Center complex and renovations at 51 Place shopping center.

This past fall, the city closed on property across from the Police Department that formerly was owned by Tecspan Concrete Structures and Jackson Ready Mix. Demolition there is complete, and the city is preparing to use a federal grant to remove concrete and create temporary overflow parking for Freedom Ridge Park on School Street.

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"This parking lot will serve as a major source of parking for events like KidFest as well as large tournaments," Hart said.

The Police Department, public works complex, court services and the library will be incorporated into the complex along with City Hall and other facilities.

The expanded complex will have space for community meeting rooms, library expansion and city offices as well as educational, retail and residential areas.

Renovation of 51 Place shopping center is ongoing with foundation repairs, repaving the parking lot and adding landscape islands, Hart said.

The city's Public Works Department has a number of water line and road projects under way this year.

"We're always looking for grant money for projects," said Public Works director Mike McCollum.

Anticipated projects include the Lake Harbour Drive widening project, Old Agency Road bridge rehabilitation, Ridgeland and Madison interchange and improving the Longmeadow Road ditch.

McGee hopes the city can bid the Lake Harbour widening project this spring once the Mississippi Department of Transportation approves the final design.

"This will move east and west traffic better and alleviate congestion on Jackson

Avenue," McGee said. "This is a really strong year of planning."

The city has gone back to the Legislature to seek a referendum on an additional one percent sales tax to fund the southeast Ridgeland redevelopment project, which could lead to expansion of commercial areas and the replacement of aging apartments with single-family homes.

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## 2012 Public Works Projects

•Lake Harbour Drive widening from U.S. 51 to Northpark Drive, going from three lanes to five: \$16 million.

•Water line project from U.S. 51 to I-220 at the Jackson city limits: \$594,000.

•Old Agency Road bridge rehabilitation: \$234,000.

•Multiuse trail pavilion and restrooms at Rice Road: \$157,000.

•Mississippi Crafts Center parking lot: \$500,000.

•Lake Harbour Drive extension from U.S. 51 to Highland Colony Parkway: \$21.4 million.

•Madison-Ridgeland connector, Ridgeland portion to run from U.S. 51 to Highland Colony Parkway: \$11 million.

•Longmeadow Ditch flood prevention: \$745,000.

•School and Wheatley streets water line: \$750,000.

•Livingston Road water line phases two and three: \$1.446 million.

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