

City's State Center To Get Housing, Shops

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BALTIMORE -- The state office complex in downtown Baltimore is being considered for a complete makeover.

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On Wednesday, Gov. Martin O'Malley detailed ambitious plans to turn State Center on Preston Street into a new main street, complete with shopping, housing and a bike depot.

Currently, the area is ugly and isolates neighborhoods, not realizing its potential, according to WBAL TV 11 News reporter David Collins. State Center is home to a cluster of government agencies and 28 acres of desolation, isolating as many as nine city neighborhoods from one another.

O'Malley toured the area on Wednesday before outlining an ambitious private/public partnership to redevelop the area around mass transit options.

"We are going to create a place where you can live, where you can work, where you can play, where you can worship, where you can be connected to your fellow men and women," O'Malley said.

The project was conceived by former Gov. Robert Ehrlich, but never hatched.

A metro subway stop would become a focal point of a new main street, complete with shops, housing, pedestrian walkways and bike paths, according to the new plan. The state is donating the land as an enticement for \$1.6 billion worth of development.

"We'll finish up our entitlement process with the city this year. It will take about a year to design our first phase, our first building, and 36 months to construct," said Caroline Moore of Struever, Eccles and Rouse.

Eutah Street will also be transformed in plans for 1.5 million square feet of commercial office space and at least a 1,000 new housing units. The state will continue to have its offices there.



The city subway and light rail already have stops in the area. Penn Station is within walking distance. Legislation passed this year by the General Assembly makes transportation money available.

"We are tripling the capacity of our MARC system. Rebuilding our transit system is part of it," said Maryland Secretary of Transportation John Porcari.

A number of state workers and others who gathered for the announcement said they would consider moving to the newly designed area.

"There was a commitment on the residential side that 30 percent would be committed to affordable and workforce housing," said Assistant state Secretary of Real Estate Michael Gaines.

Several similar projects are planned around the state, including Montgomery and Prince George's counties. Officials are anticipating a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the State Center location by 2012.