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AmericasMart deal clears way to add onto complex

6.2-million-square-foot trade complex will see an additional 1.5 million square feet

By Aisha I. Jefferson, Staff Reporter

A DEAL INKED last week has cleared the way for a major expansion to AmericasMart-Atlanta—after a long delay and a 25 percent reduction in size.

AmericasMart chairman, chief executive officer and founder John C. Portman had announced in January 2004 that his company had purchased old Greyhound Lines terminal property on Andrew Young International Boulevard to add 2 million square feet to the 6.2 million-square-foot trade mart complex.

Preliminary design work had begun for “an early 2005 groundbreaking,” said a press release at the time, with an opening for the site scheduled for early 2007.

But AMC Inc., AmericasMart parent company, tapped Holder Construction just last spring to develop the site. The construction company began Aug. 1 doing preliminary work but did not sign a contract to complete the project until Oct. 18, according to Michael T. Turnbull, an AMC spokesman.

The opening date has been changed to August 2008 because of additional site preparation, according to Keri Arroll, a spokeswoman for AMC, Inc., the parent company of AmericasMart-Atlanta. The expansion, known as AmericasMart 4, will also be 25 percent smaller than announced, coming in at 1.5 million square feet, according to Turnbull.

Turnbull would not estimate the project’s cost, although *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* quoted Portman in 2004 saying the project would cost about \$200 million.

Regarding the decrease in the project’s size, Turnbull said the project has been evolving since day one and that the 1.5 million square feet “addresses the current need for the space and businesses we will serve.”

He also said the company just began a marketing campaign for the new expansion, which was to be anchored by home furnishings and home accents shows, according to the release.

Portman’s architectural and engineering firm, John Portman & Associates, is the project’s designer. The firm declined to comment about the project.

AmericasMart acquired the bus station site in December 2003.

The expansion project will consume two acres, or one downtown city block, bordering Andrew Young International Boulevard, Harris and Williams streets and AmericasMart 2, said David J. Miller, project manager with Holder Construction.

Greyhound moved the terminal site in 1995 to its current location near the Garnett MARTA station. The old site was most recently used for

public parking.

The project is divided into two phases, with the first phase scheduled for completion in August 2008 and an undetermined completion date for the second phase, according to Turnbull.

The first phase will consist of a nine-story, 855,000-square-foot structure, while the second phase will consist of eight levels and about 645,000 square feet, Turnbull said. The second phase will go atop the first phase.

Of the nine stories for the first phase, four levels will be used for exhibition space, and the remaining five will be used for showrooms. Three of the levels will be in the basement.

The building's exterior construction would consist of glass curtain wall with some stone finish, Turnbull said.

The new site is the fourth expansion in Portman's AmericasMart-Atlanta complex. Portman's journey began in 1957 when he opened a furniture mart. Four years later the Merchandise Mart opened as the first phase of what is now known as AmericasMart-Atlanta.

AmericasMart-Atlanta was introduced 10 years ago as part of a global reposition and rebranding of the former Atlanta Market Center, Turnbull said. AmericasMart-Atlanta houses the world's largest single collection of consumer gift, home furnishings, area rug and apparel goods, Turnbull said.

The 6.2 million-square-foot AmericasMart-Atlanta complex currently consists of a three-building downtown wholesale trade mart complex. AmericasMart 1, also known as Merchandise Mart, is a 23-story, 2.3 million-square-foot building that connects to the Westin Peachtree Plaza. AmericasMart 2, also known as Gift Mart, is an 18-story, 1.4 million-square-foot mirrored tower. And the AmericasMart 3, also known as Apparel Mart, is a 15-story, 2.5 million-square-foot, octagon shaped tower with a 14-story Grand Atrium that can accommodate up to 5,000 people.

All of the buildings are connected via aerial bridges, and each has a look that is reminiscent of the time when they were constructed, Arroll said. An aerial bridge also will connect AmericasMart 4 to Gift Mart.

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