

# THE PLAIN DEALER

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## Making the Commons pay off

There are still people in Cleveland unhappy about Steelyard Commons, the enormous retail complex under construction south of downtown on land once occupied by an LTV steel mill.

Some wish the land had been set aside for industrial use, especially given the city's shortage of ready-to-build factory sites. Some worry that so much big retail will hurt neighborhood stores and downtown. Easily the loudest group of naysayers remains upset that a Wal-Mart supercenter will be one of the new complex's anchor tenants.

Even supporters of the project share some or all of these concerns. But as anyone who drives on the Jennings Freeway can clearly see, Steelyard Commons is taking shape in the Industrial Valley. Developer Mitchell Schneider and his First Interstate group expect Steelyard Commons to welcome its first shoppers in the spring of 2007.

So it is time to stop carping and start figuring on how to maximize the project's benefits, as Cleveland City Council did last week. It earmarked some of the new taxes generated at Steelyard Commons to complete the Towpath Trail and to help neighborhood retailers com-

pete with the really big new kids on the block.

Coming up with roughly \$10.5 million for the towpath is especially critical. It will leverage three times as many state and federal dollars to put the finishing touches — including building Canal Basin Park downtown, at the site of the Ohio & Erie Canal's first lock — on a ribbon of water and greenery that snakes deep into Tuscarawas County. Spurs off the trail will connect Cleveland neighborhoods to the lakefront and the Emerald Necklace. When it's finished, this region should have a signature amenity and a development magnet to rival any other urban area's.

Two important provisos: Most tax-increment plans help subsidize private development; this one does not. First Interstate is even paying for the portion of the trail that runs through Steelyard Commons. Also, the city's public schools will get their full share of new taxes.

This smart legislation was shepherded through council by Joe Cimperman, who last January was pushing an ordinance that threatened the project. Outflanked in that effort, he has sought to make the best of the situation. This city needs more such resilience and creativity.