

Progressing Forward: Alton 2018

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ALTON - Alton Mayor Brant Walker was brimming with enthusiasm when asked about his views of Alton in 2018 last Friday.

In 2017, Alton went through several changes. The people reelected Walker, but the mayoral race brought a lot of issues in the city to a head. Before the race had finished in April, many things were in the process of transformation. After the people had spoken, those changes kept coming. Walker said he would like to continue that trend into the future.

Walker spoke of new things in Alton with a sense of hope. He said 2018 would see the 30 acres around the new train station start to get developed with potential real estate, which may bring more retail business to Alton by the end of the year, or early into 2019.

He also spoke of the demolition of the Macy's building and the multi-million dollar investment into the Alton Square Mall as another reason to be optimistic toward Alton. He said "prime real estate space" would be left in the wake of the building's destruction. As much as 30 acres will be available once the demolition is complete early this year.

When asked about the interior of the mall, Walker acknowledged the recent closing of Vitamin World was not a good thing, but attributed that to "good business, but bad corporation." He said many stores inside the mall were doing well.

Alton Square Mall owners, Georgia-based Hull Group, made a plan last spring to redevelop the mall - starting with the demolition of Macy's. In 2018, the mall's interior may begin its extensive redesign, with the first and second floors being divided further, and a possible movie theater coming in the next few years.

Besides the demolition of Macy's, many Altonians were expecting (and some were mourning) the coming destruction of the former Alton Cine building. Walker said he hoped that building would have been destroyed by now, but said the ownership has yet to make it happen.

Another building lost to time in 2017 was the former Alton train station on College Avenue. After the completion of the new station off Homer Adams Parkway, the old station was demolished, despite a community push to save it. The former station would have had to have been moved from its location near the railroad tracks, and had a new usage somewhere else.

Unfortunately, the costs to move the building made saving it an extreme hassle, despite Union Pacific, the building's ownership, allowing the building to go into the hands of a non-profit for as low as \$1.

Both Walker and Alton Police Chief Jason Simmons said the city's community policing model would continue to play a major role in the future as well, when asked what the city would do to make its streets safer.

That model was proposed by former St. Louis Police Chief and University of Missouri Professor Daniel Isom who did work to see both the citizens of Alton and the police department's views on how policing should look in the city.

That plan is being handled and mapped by the Community Relations Commission.