

Leaders hope parking garage will spur downtown Pascagoula development

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(Press-Register/Kaija Wilkinson)

reshly driven concrete pilings at the site of Pascagoula's riverfront parking garage, which city leaders hope will spur development. The ultimate hope is to have a hotel, restaurants, and a world-class marina. Benning Construction Co. is the primary contractor.

PASCAGOULA, Miss. -- Workers are driving pilings and moving underground pipe to make way for a 300-space, three-story riverfront parking garage, expected to be complete by fall.

The city hopes the elegantly designed garage will spur development -- including restaurants and a hotel -- along the river, close to downtown.

In the past few weeks, contractors drove about 200 60-foot concrete pilings into the ground to make way for the 250 or so pre-cast concrete pieces that are being manufactured by Tindall Corp. in Moss Point.

"It's kind of like a giant Lego project," said Jaci Turner, city projects manager. "They will be putting the blocks together fairly quickly."

The \$3.8 million garage is the key part of a \$12 million to \$14 million riverfront revitalization plan, funded entirely by a Community Development Block Grant administered by Mississippi Development Authority.

Besides easing downtown parking, the garage could help attract additional development, according to the city.

Turner described the garage as "the major infrastructure piece to an overall riverfront development." The city plans in the next several weeks to solicit bids from private developers to partner on at least one or two projects.

A market study showed that the area can support a 168-room hotel, she said, and retail and restaurants are being courted.

The project already includes a cottage village that will start as residential and turn into retail, boating docks, boardwalks and piers.

The garage promises to be "one of the nicer garages on the coast," said Joey Duggan of Pascagoula's Compton Engineering. It will have inlaid brick panels, arched windows, ornamental railings, and -- keeping with a shipping industry theme -- lantern-style light fixtures, he said.

"We're trying to make it look like it's been there for several years," he said.

The outer ground level will have space for murals, advertising or projecting movies, he said.

Once the pilings are in place, Tindall plans to start shipping the pre-cast concrete pieces by truck in the next several weeks and put them together "like tinker toys" onsite, according to Alex Guthrie, senior project manager for Tindall's Mississippi division.

With about 140 employees, Tindall's local operation moved from Biloxi to Moss Point after Hurricane Katrina, building a new \$26 million facility largely with GO Zone funds. The company has built many parking garages for casinos, condominiums and public projects.

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