

except in Sears, the mall's only anchor store after Macy's closed this past spring.

The target date for revitalizing time frame to revitalize the mall was "yesterday," said Steve Campbell, chief financial officer of Plaza Properties, which has co-owned the property since 2005.

"We haven't made as much progress as what we would like right now," Campbell said. "We're trying to reposition it; we just don't have anything lined up."

Plans for Downtown's City Center also remain vague.

"We're still very much in evaluation mode," said Les Morris, spokesman spokesperson for Simon Property Group, the mall developer that purchased City Center earlier this year. "It's been only a couple months since we acquired it and we're still evaluating the property and its potential."

But it's hard to argue that the increasingly empty City Center has much going for it. During a recent weekday lunch hour, mall employees generally outnumbered shoppers. The most populated store was A Dollar, with 11 people shopping.

Even though Westland and City Center remain open, with regular hours, both malls are included on the Web site deadmalls.com, which features more than 300 user-submitted reviews of ailing malls. One review calls Westland "the ideal dead mall museum."

Also among the 21 Ohio malls listed on the site are Northland Mall, which was closed and partially demolished in 2002, and the former New Market Mall, which is being redeveloped into a traditional outdoor shopping center.

By dropping "mall" from its title and eliminating interior hallways, New Market is just "following the trends," said Kristin Mack, a spokeswoman spokesperson for the development company Casto. "Malls are now almost becoming obsolete, in the traditional sense."

So where else do malls go when they die?

Columbus retail analyst Chris Boring said says there's no single answer. "If I had a solution, I'd be really rich now."

One suggestion by the Congress for the New Urbanism is to redevelop "malls into main streets." If old parking lots became sidewalks and old malls became shops, offices and homes, the result could be a civic space that adds value to a community, while offering "the traditional shopping experience that existed before malls," said John Norquist, CNU's the group's president and chief executive.

Similar plans are under way at the former Northland site, which is slated to become Northland Village, a group of stores and offices. The old Lazarus store there already houses an Ohio Department of Taxation office with more than 1,000 workers.

Going mixed-use - perhaps in phases and by various developers - is also a good option for City Center and Westland, Boring said.

City Center "will not be a mall again," Boring said. And, built "as a fortress," it couldn't easily add the street-level dining and entertainment options so popular at Easton.

Westland, along with its sister malls Northland and Eastland, it was built on the outskirts of 1960s Columbus, when the city's population was spilling out onto new highways and into new suburbs.

For this growing class of suburbanites, malls were convenient for driving and parking. They were climate-controlled. And being windowless, traffic-free and largely upscale, malls felt safer than did the idea of shopping in gritty downtowns.

A new wave of development has pushed the old malls aside. From 1997 to 2001, Columbus built more malls than any city in the nation as the Mall at Tuttle Crossing, Easton and Polaris came to life.

Westland used to be popular when it had more stores. Kayla Neff, 16, tried to name some that have come and gone.

"Rave, Macy's, Wendy's, Chi-Chi's," she started. Then she turned to her friend, Gwen Farley, also 16.

"What else used to be here?" Neff asked. "I can't even remember."

"We used to come here when they had more stuff," Farley said.

"It's just so dead now."

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