

NEWS

Reclaiming history

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A hundred years ago at Depot Avenue and S. Main Street, the railroad station was the nexus of rail and industrial activity for Gainesville.

But since 1936, it has been neglected, badly needing repairs.

Now, Gainesville's old railroad depot is about three months into phase one of renovation, about halfway through, said Darlene "D." Henrichs, the historic preservation planner for the city of Gainesville and project manager of the depot rehabilitation/restoration.

This "stabilization" phase includes stopping water from coming into the building, installing a rolled roof before a final metal one is put on and removing lead paint and asbestos, Henrichs said.

She said the \$1.2 million depot renovation project is the centerpiece of a larger effort to redevelop the Depot Avenue neighborhood. The depot is on the National Register of Historic Places.

A 38-acre park and 11-acre stormwater pond are planned to replace the current "brownfield" - abandoned, polluted land from commercial or industrial use that isn't being redeveloped - by about 2005, said Matt Dube«, project coordinator for the Community Redevelopment Agency.

Phase two involves separating the building into three or four parts and moving it to a noncontaminated site until the brownfield cleanup is complete, Henrichs said. Although it won't return to its exact location, it will be 28 feet south of where it is now so enhancements can be made to Depot Avenue, Dube« said.

Henrichs said it's too early to know what the renovated depot will be used for, but community meetings have yielded suggestions: a bike, ice cream or sandwich shop; information and models on Gainesville's historical railroad industry; and community meeting space.