

# Hoover convention center, theater plans put on hold

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The city of Hoover's proposal to convert the former Macy's department store at the Riverchase Galleria into a three-story convention center and theater is on hold as mall owners continue to seek a retailer for the 285,000-square-foot space, city officials said.

Hoover Mayor Tony Petelos on Thursday night gave Hoover City Council members a

brief outline of a draft study conducted by the Minnesota-based Conventions, Sports & Leisure International firm.

"We've got documentation with the study that shows this would be a good project for the Galleria, the city of Hoover and for the Birmingham area," Petelos said.

The draft study notes the strengths and weaknesses of a convention center in

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## MALL: Galleria retailer sought

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Hoover, finding that a new convention center would act as an "economic generator and a public resource." The city has proposed a facility that could attract conventions and conferences of up to 1,000 people and have a theater that could seat at least 2,000 people.

But Petelos said mall owners for now are still hoping to find another retailer for the space, most recently occupied by Belk. Nordstrom was slated to move into the spot in 2012, but those plans fell through.

Efforts to reach the mall's owners, General Growth Properties and Montgomery-based Jim Wilson & Associates, for comment were unsuccessful.

City officials are awaiting the final study and will share it with mall owners, Petelos said. An in-house study projects preliminary costs of \$43 million, including construction and architectural fees, he said.

The study indicated the

convention center and theater could create about 175 full-time and part-time jobs.

Among the strengths noted:

► The Galleria is one of the largest malls in the state/region and has helped enhance recognition of Hoover.

► There is a relatively large number of restaurants and retail businesses surrounding the mall and throughout the city.

► There's a perception of safety and convenience with parking and accessibility.

► Relative to its size, Hoover offers a large number of hotels.

Weaknesses included:

► Hoover has a limited perception as a convention destination, and the city is viewed by some non-locals as a "suburb with a big mall."

► The city lacks a traditional downtown and/or central business district with a density of visitor amenities and entertainment options.

► There are a number of potentially competitive event venues in the greater local marketplace.

► The city is inland, versus on a coast.

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