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Midtown makeover

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The Midtown Great Escape is gone. And the vintage brick building from which that legendary local retailer sold Marvel comic books and classic rock vinyl might soon be gone too, replaced by a higher-end structure called Hill Center Broadway.

Given pricey Midtown rents, don't expect future tenants to include a used record shop that appeals to bohemians and hipsters.

Hill Realty Co. — which has transitioned from developing suburban retail and grocery space to focusing on mixed-use urban infill — owns the property and has enlisted Southeast Venture to design a new structure. Given its triangular position at the Broadway and Division Street split, the site is likely one of Midtown's five most logistically noteworthy.

"We've been working on this for months," said Jimmy Granbery, Hill Realty CEO.

Southeast Venture has put an architectural stamp on Nashville with its handsome Hill Center Belle Meade (a Hill Realty development), sleek Gateway at Armory Oaks (home to Nashville School of Law) and industrial-tinged 1700 Midtown apartment building.

Granbery said the city is considering reconfiguring 20th Avenue to align with Broadway, which would better allow Hill Realty to move forward with redevelopment.

“We’ve done four or five schematics,” Granbery said. “It’s a pretty tight site.”

The site’s 0.3-acre tightness could lead to a distinctive new building. Visualize a five- to seven-story flatiron structure bathed in glass and metal, its street-level space home to, say, a women’s clothing boutique and a smallish Ace Hardware, with the other floors serving as apartments. Underground parking is doable.

No doubt, the quirky pre-World War II structure anchoring the V-shaped site will be missed. Some folks might want it spared, with a mom-and-pop biz setting up shop.

But Midtown 2011 is vastly unlike its pre-1990 self, when indie retailers could afford space. Today, the nabe is dominated by the restaurant, white-collar office and medical sectors.

“We can hope the building will be creatively redeveloped,” said Tim Walker, executive director of the Metro Historical Commission. “But because the building density allowance is so high there, it often dooms these type buildings.”