Upcoming renovations promise to bring a new energy to the Metropolitan Campus of Cuyahoga Community College, with greenery and glass transforming a dated concrete landscape into a dynamic educational environment.

The revitalization of the College’s oldest campus involves two projects: an overhaul of the Campus Center building and reconstruction of the plaza walkways that carry visitors across the grounds. Work is underway and will continue through 2020.

The projects will transform a setting virtually unchanged since Tri-C developed Metro Campus in the 1960s after opening as Ohio’s first community college.

But the projects represent more than changes to buildings and grounds.

“This will do much more than modernize Metro Campus,” said Michael Schoop, president of the campus since 2006. “It will transform our ideas about how we use the campus to teach, to learn and to interact with each other.

“We’re creating a new atmosphere that will inspire, engage and spark creativity.”

The Campus Center project, when complete, will leave a building unrecognizable from the hulking structure currently standing along East 30th Street between Woodland and Community College avenues.

Workers will peel off the building’s outer skin and demolish the interior, leaving only the skeletal remains of the original frame. Deconstruction of the structure should begin before the end of 2016.

Then comes the rebuild.
Renderings show a finished product with a glass exterior gently curving toward campus. Windows dominate the façade, side and back to reveal sweeping views and bathe the interior in natural light.

The new design maximizes the building’s existing on-site footprint, adding 11,000 square feet of usable space. The roomier accommodations expand student social areas as well as classroom and meeting space.

Plans call for the updated Campus Center to reopen in time for fall semester in 2018.

“Campus Center should serve as the hub of activity and heartbeat of Metro,” said Cynthia Leitson, the College’s vice president of capital and construction. “With this renovation, it will.”

The building’s three floors will offer amenities such as:

• A Barnes & Noble bookstore featuring a coffee shop
• A food court and dining area that includes seating in an outdoor courtyard
• Offices for student government and Tri-C’s award-winning student newspaper
• Classroom space for High Tech Academy and other college prep programs
• A conference hall for reception and public meetings
• In addition, architects included unique touches such as “seating cubbies” — essentially study nooks built into the walls — and bench seating along the main staircase to encourage students to spend time at Campus Center.

“No matter where you are in the building,” Leitson said, “there will be an exciting vibe.”

That feeling will carry over to the outside with the plaza renovations, which will touch every corner of Metro Campus and convert the current concrete canvas into an urban oasis lush with greenery.

Planned walking paths will wind through gardens, trees and lawn areas spread across the grounds. Benches will provide spots to sit and relax in a welcoming environment that reflects a traditional campus feel.

All existing concrete walkways will be removed and replaced during the project, which also provides vital repairs to the underground parking garage that spreads below campus. The plaza essentially serves as the roof of the parking garage.

The plaza project will be done in four phases, each involving a quadrant of campus. Work on the southwest quad began this summer. That will be followed by the northeast quad (2017/2018), northwest quad (2018/2019) and southeast quad (2019/2020).

The two projects build on the ongoing revitalization of Cleveland’s Campus District. Located just east of downtown, the district has seen significant investment the past few years to create a more vibrant community.

The projects also offer environmental benefits. The additional green space on the redone plaza will reduce storm water runoff, while the Campus Center will be rebuilt to meet industry benchmarks for green building and sustainability.

The Campus Center project will cost an estimated $38 million, while the plaza renovations are expected to total $28 million. State funds are expected to cover nearly half of the combined costs.