

DEVELOPER PLANS WEST TAMPA CONDO PROJECT

APARTMENTS, RETAIL, RESTAURNATS PROPOSED

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Drive north onto Rome or Oregon avenues from Kennedy Boulevard and there's a world of light industry: a lumber yard, body shop, electrical company, wholesale florist and taxi cab office.

It's an economy that has been in place for decades.

But with housing and property demands increasing in Tampa, that landscape may soon be a thing of the past.

Developer Ken Morin, president of Morin Development Group, has contracts on 10 acres between Cypress and Gray streets, and Oregon and Rome avenues.

Morin plans to build a potential \$100 million project with 60 town houses, 80 to 100 condominiums, 250 apartment units and commercial retail with restaurants, a deli and hair salon.

"If I were to guess, this would be the largest proposed development in the history of West Tampa," Morin said.

He has applied for a land-use change with the Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission. A vote isn't expected until December and, if approved, Morin then must go to the Tampa City Council to request zoning changes.

The large amount of land that could be compiled in the area enticed Morin.

Building on small lots wouldn't change the area, but a large project could transform the industrial park that is sandwiched by two neighborhoods, Morin said. It also can encourage other developers who want to build on one and two lots, and it can bring back the neighborhood, Morin said.

"For whatever reason, this area was overlooked," Morin said. "Right now you have two neighborhoods severed by an industrial park." The project "will tie them back together."

Longtime resident Harriett McCray said the project could be a catalyst to unite the neighborhood, bring jobs and offer a variety of new housing.

She envisions that someone could move into an apartment, upgrade to a condominium and later to a town house.

"We think it's a good thing for the community," McCray said. "It's isn't as dense as we thought it would be. The property is huge. It can accommodate that size."

The town houses would be three bedrooms and two bathrooms, with 1,400 to 1,600 square feet and a two-car garage. The condominiums would be one, two and three bedrooms with 900 to 1,600 square feet. The apartments would be one and two bedrooms ranging from 850 to 1,200 square feet.

The town houses would sell in the low- to mid-\$300,000s, Morin said. He didn't have a price for the townhouses or rental costs for the apartments.

The buildings will range from two-story town houses to three- and four-story condominiums and four- and five-story apartment complexes. Except for the town houses, the buildings will vary in elevation.

To reduce street parking, the project includes a garage on site for residents and customers of the retail shops.

Morin anticipates young professionals, middle managers and college students taking advantage of the development.

For five years, Morin has considered proposing a development in the area. In the last year, his staff worked on assembling the property.

All property that they need for the project is under contract, Morin said. That includes large businesses, such as Graybar Electric, 801 N. Rome Ave., Nations Floral, 1516 Lemon St., and Checker Cab and Yellow Cab, 502 N. Oregon Ave.

“I believe the neighborhood believes in what we are doing, so we are prepared to close,” Morin said.

People who live near the project site favor development, but want to learn more before endorsing Morin’s proposal.

Ruth McNair, who has lived in the area since 1947, supports revitalization but doesn’t want another Hyde Park development with condominiums and town houses. She prefers single-family houses that complement the surrounding neighborhoods, but she is willing to hear more from the developer before finalizing an opinion.

“It’s maybe too much for the neighborhood,” said McNair, president of the West Riverfront Neighborhood Crime Watch Association. “He may have to cut it down. We just don’t want another Hyde Park.”

“It makes me sick when I look at Hyde Park. Everywhere they can stick a condo they have done it. Some of them look like a commercial warehouse.”

Three years ago, Jeffery Wilson moved from Town ‘N Country to a home across the street from Graybar Electric.

Although the electric company is a good neighbor, Wilson wouldn’t mind a change. New development would increase his property value and reduce crime. It will also prompt the city to pay more attention to the area, he said.

“Hyde Park is getting a lot more money than we do on this end,” said Wilson, an associate pastor at Greater Bethel Missionary Baptist Church.

Wilson isn’t too receptive to four- and five-story buildings, he said. But the economic impact the project brings might be too much for the area to ignore.

“I am in favor of anything that would increase my property value,” Wilson said. “It can only benefit me.”

McCray and others want the developer to work with the residents.

“You move into a community and you should want to be a part of it,” McCray said.

She wants the developer to accept residents who may qualify for a government-sponsored, first-time home buyer program or down payment assistance. People who live in the community should have an opportunity to live in the condominiums and town houses, she said.

Thad Jenkins, who has attended New Salem Missionary Baptist Church at 405 N. Oregon Ave, for years, favors development. He said developers must keep in mind the people who already live there.

“We can’t hold up progress,” Jenkins said. “But we would like to be included in the process.

“All the new construction is great. The city needs to grow. Everything needs to grow and progress. But you have to look out for the people who are here now.”

“What they are putting up is not for people who are here,” Jenkins said. “Where are they going and what are they going to be able to buy with the money they are providing them?”