

OUR OPINION
Morin's Urban Village
Will Bring New Vitality To West Tampa

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Source: The Tampa Tribune

Developer Ken Morin wants to build a 13-acre, \$170 million development of town houses, apartments and businesses in a mixed-use neighborhood of warehouses and homes just west of the University of Tampa.

The project's proximity to downtown and the West Shore business district, along with the perks Morin has promised neighbors and future homeowners, makes this plan a desirable development for West Tampa.

Morin, whose urban renewal projects include the Walters Crossing shopping center at Dale Mabry and Interstate 275, is showing himself to be a responsible developer. He has helped arrange a down-payment assistance grant program and will provide almost half a million dollars for existing neighbors to improve their homes.

Yet some residents of West Tampa are wary of the West End project. They say it will disrupt their quiet community and bring higher taxes if property values skyrocket as they did when Hyde Park was revived decades ago.

New development naturally increases property values of surrounding homes, but homeowners have some tax protection because the Save Our Homes amendment caps tax increases at 3 percent annually.

As it stands now, the empty warehouses do nothing but depress the value of their homes and the vitality of their neighborhood.

Change is understandably hard for some, but this development will turn a depressed light-industrial area into a desirable neighborhood designed to reflect its Spanish roots.

The good news is that West Tampa has a second chance. Redevelopment is breathing new life into its neighborhoods. Blocks of new homes are being built and attractive new businesses are being added along major thoroughfares.

And it shouldn't be overlooked that 8,600-square-feet of retail space included in Morin's development will provide a source of jobs for people living nearby who may not have access to transportation.

It is much better for this community to redevelop blighted areas rather than continuing to build new homes farther from Tampa's business centers. Suburban sprawl does nothing to help manage our limited resources, alleviate our transportation problems or create affordable housing.

West Tampa has a proud tradition as a place that hard-working families call home. What it needs now is a chance to bring a new generation of homeowners into the fold.

Morin's project should be given the green light when it comes before Tampa City Council on Thursday.