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Residential highrises approved for Gwinnett Place

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Things at Gwinnett Place may be looking up — about 25 stories — after county commissioners approved a zoning change Tuesday to allow construction of twin residential highrises on the south side of the mall.

Plans for The Grand at Gwinnett call for 312 condominiums priced from \$350,000-\$1 million, said attorney Michael Sullivan, representing property owner Madison Walk LLC. With retail space on the first floor of each tower, the \$150 million highrise would be the tallest building in the county.

Defeated at a zoning hearing in 2006, the proposal was revived after a court-issued consent order placed it back before the commission.

Project developer George Thorndyke said he wants to begin construction in 18 months.

"It's these type of projects, such as what (George Thorndyke) has envisioned that are really going to transform the Gwinnett Place area from what we see today to what it can be and what it must become in order to thrive in the future," said Joe Allen, executive director of Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District.

The proposal met with opposition from attorney Victor Moldovan, representing Sears Roebuck, which occupies the east corner of the mall. Moldovan argued that Sears bought its property in 1982 and has since updated and renovated with the thought that the area would remain zoned as a general business district.

Moldovan questioned whether anyone had \$150 million to spend on construction in these economic times. He said it would be disastrous if the project were begun, then abandoned. District 1 Commissioner Shirley Lasseter said she backed the project "in hopes that this will bring a new start to that mall and to the CID and to Gwinnett County."

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