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FEATURED

## Major redevelopment planned for Gwinnett Prado site

Concept announced at Partnership Gwinnett summit

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The new owners of the Gwinnett Prado shopping center outlined some preliminary plans for redeveloping the property, for commercial and hotel uses, during the Metro Atlanta Redevelopment Summit in the Duluth area on Thursday. (Staff Photo)

A slowly dying shopping center near Gwinnett Place Mall is in line for a massive

redevelopment.

The largely vacant, 32-acre Gwinnett Prado shopping center on Pleasant Hill Road was bought by new owners out of bankruptcy proceedings about two months ago. Those new owners are now looking to take on a radical overhaul of the property that could see most of what's currently there torn down.

They are eyeing a mixed-use project that's attractive to millennials, although details haven't been finalized yet.

"(Gwinnett Prado's got) a lot of the old traditional design that would be considered obsolete today, open spaces for parking, and it's really unfriendly for what the current consumer likes," John Mansour, from the Ayoub and Mansour law firm, said.

"What we're looking at for this site is another mixed-use project to bring to the Atlanta area. We see a residential component. We see additional commercial components. We're looking into a hotel component as well."

The news about the planned redevelopment came during Partnership Gwinnett's Metro Atlanta Redevelopment Summit at Studio Movie Grill, which is a short distance from the Prado in Gwinnett Place Mall area.

The project has officials who work with the Gwinnett Place area excited about its potential to help revitalize the area. Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District Executive Director Joe Allen said the CID identified Gwinnett Prado as one of its top catalyst sites for the district a few years ago.

"It's been happening very quickly and they've been really pushing the ball forward," Allen said. "They've been putting together various plans and we've had discussions with the various leadership of the county, they've gotten attorneys ... so we're really excited about what the potential could be."

Allen admitted the new ownership and redevelopment plans for the site seemingly came out of nowhere a few months ago. The new owners met with CID officials back in the spring, and have been moving quickly to buy the property and get redevelopment plans in place, he added.

“Really because of the situation of going through the bankruptcy, we’ve really only known them since the late May or early June time frame,” Allen said.

“They came to use and we began setting up meetings with Charlotte Nash and Glenn Stephens, and (Partnership Gwinnett’s Nick Masino and Andrew Carnes) and the planning commissioners and Commissioner (Jace) Brooks and others to find out what the community wants for that 32-acre piece of property.”

As Gwinnett Prado has aged over the decades, many of its old occupants have closed their doors, leaving a plethora of empty storefronts in their wake. A former Rio Bravo at the site has sat empty for years.

GW Supermarket is the largest tenant in the development, and an Office Max in the shopping center currently holding a going out of business sale. With Office Max’s planned departure, many of the other other businesses that will be left other than the GW Supermarket will be small Asian restaurants.

“They’re looking at taking a lot of that down and putting in something new in its place,” Allen said.

Not everything at the Prado will fall victim to the wrecking ball, though.

“We are going to keep the main building there since we do have tenants in place, but luckily for us the rest of the property is actually vacant so we can work around it,” said Insignia LLC managing director Chaz Lazarian, whose company bought the property for \$17 million in July and is working with Mansour on the project.

Mansour and Lazarian see it as a project that could help spur further additional redevelopment in an aging area that county leaders are hoping to rejuvenate. Mansour pointed to the area's demographics and traffic numbers as positives that increase the chances for a successful redevelopment of the site.

"This site offers some tremendous opportunities just because of the size of the acreage and its location," Mansour said. "We believe, and I think that the CID and others kind of agree, that this is one of the main catalyst sites in Gwinnett County, or in this CID district.



"We're hopeful that a redesign of this project would be a successful residential, a successful commercial redevelopment of that type of energy that millennials will bring to this (with) access to the adjacent (McDaniel Farm Park) and trails."

Mansour added that he and his partners also plan to look at "what we can do with our space to provide a catalyst for this entire area to create a more urban feel that Gwinnett County really is lacking."

Lazarian said the Prado's new owners are meeting with county and CID officials to see what the needs in the area are and will base their final decision on how to redevelop it based on this discussions. Still, he and Mansour said the layout of Gwinnett Prado, while common for the period in which it was built, no longer works for development.

“Today, it doesn’t make any sense at all in the way its laid out,” Lazarian said. “It just looks like the buildings were thrown on the property ... So our idea is to completely reconfigure the property.”

The announcement about the Gwinnett Prado redevelopment wasn’t the only action at the redevelopment summit.

Attendees also heard brief presentations on the Twin Lakes redevelopment project in Peachtree Corners, the Parson’s Alley restaurant and entertainment district project in downtown Duluth, the new Braves stadium in Cobb County and other redevelopment projects taking place throughout the rest of metro Atlanta and around the state.

Parson’s Alley received the 2016 Neighborhood Redevelopment Award at the summit, while Sandy Springs’ City Springs project received the Community Redevelopment Award and DeKalb County’s Suburban Plaza project received the Regional Redevelopment Award.

A panel discussion featuring Local Republic co-owner Ben Bailey, H.G. Restaurant Partners and McCray Venture Inc. President Randy McCray, Vantage Realty Partners Owner Chris Carter and Shumacher Group President and Managing Broker Harold V. Shumacher was also held to discuss issues restaurants face in redevelopment projects.

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