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# Could one massive redevelopment project fuel a Gwinnett Place revival?

Tyler Estep

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Developers are hoping to bring new life to the aging -- and largely abandoned -- Gwinnett Prado shopping center off Pleasant Hill Road. SPECIAL PHOTO

The Gwinnett Prado shopping center, **like much of the surrounding Gwinnett Place area**, has fallen on difficult times.

There's the Great Wall Supermarket, which does good business catering to the region's Asian community, but the once-proud Rio Bravo restaurant has been empty for a decade or more.

Target relocated long, long ago. Office Depot is departing soon.

What's left on the 32-acre property between Pleasant Hill and Old Norcross roads is a handful of small restaurants, a whole lot of empty storefronts and a sea of asphalt. But a group of big-thinking (and well-heeled) investors hope to turn the tide — both for the shopping center and the entire area.

"The opportunity is there," Joe Allen, executive director of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District, said Tuesday. "We just need that pioneer."

Enter Chaz Y. Lazarian and Insignia LLC, who shelled out more than \$16 million to buy the Texas-shaped property in late July. They hope to demolish the existing center (minus the supermarket) and create a sprawling mixed-use center that would include apartments, retail, office space and a hotel.

A "modern, eclectic mix of retailers and restaurants that can appeal to all demographics in the area," Lazarian called it.

"We're hoping to change the stigma [of Gwinnett Place] by putting an Intown type of development ... into the deal that will definitely get more people to start talking about it again," he said.

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Gwinnett Place Mall opened in 1984 and **flourished for years**, but the construction of the Mall of Georgia, changing demographics, the Great Recession and the general languishing of traditional shopping centers have all but forced it out of business.

Much of the surrounding area — including the Prado shopping center, about a mile to the mall's west — has suffered along with it.

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That's the reason property owners in the area formed the Gwinnett Place CID, a concentrated attempt to spruce up the area and lure back customers, in 2005 — and why the Prado proposal would have such huge implications.

"We need that spark," Allen said. "If we can get something like this ... As soon as we get someone to believe in the area, make that investment in the area, you will see redevelopment begin to spread like wildfire in the district."

Lazarian kept specifics under his hat Tuesday, and there's still miles of red tape to cut through. But his group hopes to have initial site plans finalized in the coming weeks.

"We're hoping by next summer we'll have at least one of the components starting to take off," Lazarian said. "We're pushing forward to try to move this as fast as possible."

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