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25-story condo complex could tower over Gwinnett

By GEORGE CHIDI
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One of America's most rapidly developing counties will add something new under freshly submitted plans: a skyline.

After looking at sites in Buckhead, a major architectural firm has decided to build a 25-story residential condominium complex in Gwinnett County. The site is near Steve Reynolds Boulevard and Singleton Road near I-85.



(ENLARGE)

A developer wants to build two 25-story condominium towers, containing 263 residential units and about 112,000 square feet of retail space, near I-85 and Gwinnett Place mall. The towers, which would be by far the tallest buildings in Gwinnett County, were made possible by a recent change in building regulations in the rapidly growing suburban county.

The high-rise is the first proposed under county regulations adopted in December to allow residential buildings to rise more than three stories in Gwinnett without special permission. An architect with the firm designing the project said developers had looked at Buckhead as a potential site but focused on Gwinnett after the new rules were adopted.

The towering condominiums would be the tallest buildings in Gwinnett County and may help area's change from suburb to city, one county planning commissioner said Monday.

"I think that actually if you were to compare us to suburbs elsewhere, we're quite urban already," Planning Commissioner Peggy Boydston said. "I think the idea of high-rises is wonderful."

But there's still a long way to go before construction can begin. The project still must be reviewed by Gwinnett and metro Atlanta planners and the Gwinnett County Commission. The developer hopes to attract commercial tenants to the retail areas.

According to papers filed with county planning officials, the two towers would contain 263 residential units and about 112,000 square feet of retail space on four floors. A 10,000-square-foot roof garden parking deck and a fitness center would serve residents and guests, according to the developer.

At almost 300 feet tall, the condominiums would rise more than 100 feet higher than the building currently claiming the title of Gwinnett's tallest, the nearby Marriott hotel at Gwinnett Place mall.

A spokesman with the architectural firm Yamasaki Associates of Troy, Mich., would not disclose the company's expected construction cost for the project or the expected price per unit. Some of the project's projections remain incomplete, said Sunghoon Jung, an associate with Yamasaki.

The developers are flying by the seat of their pants as they figure out what the public wants and how to deliver it, Jung said.

"The good thing is that we're the first," he said. "The bad thing is also that we're first."

The architects are developing the 4.7-acre tract with other investors as Steve Reynolds Boulevard. The company has contracted to purchase the land from Rowe Partners LP.

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Yamasaki has built similar mixed-use projects around the world, from Dubai to Seoul, South Korea. The company is counting on its experience with other developments to help it navigate the process, said.

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At about 56 units per acre, the development, if approved, would be the densest residential in Gwinnett County. Many of the architect's projects have been built in crowded cities on very tight sites, requiring a keen awareness of how to use space efficiently. But the character of Gwinnett County, emerging as an urban area, requires a unique approach, Jung said.

"This will be different not just from high-rises in Buckhead, but in Dallas or Chicago or wherever," he said. "I'm not trying to do Korea, and this project isn't trying to target the Asian market specifically. We're open to anybody in Gwinnett County. We're in context."

The Atlanta Regional Commission will meet with the developers on Monday. Gwinnett County administrators have tentatively scheduled a public hearing on the project in June, but the date probably will be pushed back as regional planners have their say, said Planning Director Steve Logan.

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