
Planning Commission endorses first high-rise rezoning amid traffic concern

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LAWRENCEVILLE - Gwinnett County's first high-rise rezoning cleared one hurdle Wednesday night, but the project's wings could be clipped because of traffic concerns.

County planning commissioners generally praised the shops and two condo towers proposed for the Gwinnett Place business district, but said the development should be limited to one high-rise if it does not have two driveways.

As proposed, the two 25-story towers would only have one entrance on Steve Reynolds Boulevard, and because of a concrete median, residents and shoppers leaving the site would have to turn right on Steve Reynolds and then make a U-turn to reach nearby Interstate 85.

For that reason, the planning panel said if the land-locked parcel is not connected to another road by an access drive, the development should be limited to one 20-story tower with a maximum of 200 residential condos, instead of the proposed 263 units.

The developers' attorney, Lee Tucker, said such a zoning condition would kill the project. He also said studies show a second access point is not needed. "We believe that our site access works for this development," Tucker said. Regardless, he said the developers have talked to surrounding land owners about using their property to create a drive to either Club Drive or Shackleford Road, but have had no success.

Other zoning conditions could also prove problematic, Tucker said. Planning commissioners are recommending the Gwinnett County Commission make the developers donate \$100,000 to the county for road improvements on Steve Reynolds Boulevard, and another \$50,000 for fire protection in the Gwinnett Place area.

There was no public opposition to the high-rise proposal being spearheaded by Yamasaki Associates, an architectural firm based in Troy, Mich. Residents from the nearby Duluth Place Condominiums spoke in favor of it. One of them, Steve Carmichael, said the project - with condos costing from

\$263,000 to \$800,000, according to the developers - would help improve area property values.

Gwinnett County commissioners, which have the final say over the rezoning, are scheduled to hold another public hearing and take a final vote July 25.