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High-rise condos abandoned for Gwinnett, shorter towers now planned

DELICIOUS



By **BEN SMITH**

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The developer of a fledgling plan to build Gwinnett's first high-rise condominiums at I-85 and Steve Reynolds Boulevard has abandoned the project.

Instead Kelly Hong, chief executive officer of Yamasaki Development, is now seeking to build residential towers a mere 400 feet from the moribund La Bella Verde project.

"She's excited about this project and disappointed with what happened with the other project," said Hong's attorney, Michael Sullivan. "But this is a better piece of property, a better opportunity and a better project for Gwinnett County."

The La Bella Verde project was abandoned after the groundbreaking was delayed several times. Hong's latest proposal was filed under the company Y Group Inc.

As with the now defunct project, Villa More is intended to be a mixed-used development featuring office space and shops. It also includes three stories of underground parking that provide nearly 2,500 spaces.

Unlike La Bella Verde, the proposed Villa More development is directly adjacent to the interstate.

The plan features three residential towers and a hotel, as compared with the two 25-story high-rises that were proposed on the La Bella Verde.

The Villa More tract also is nearly 10 acres, roughly twice the size of the La Bella Verde site. The two sites are separated by a bank. But Villa More's proposed high-rises are significantly shorter. None is proposed to be taller than 15 stories.

It's not yet known how the county's Board of Commissioners will react to this proposal.

"I really don't know. We can't say," said District 1 Commissioner Lorraine Green, who represents the area. "I haven't seen a site plan yet."

Green added that the tract is already zoned for a 12-story tower.

The commissioners supported the \$180 million La Bella Verde project, which last year was the first high-rise residential project to be greenlighted by the board under a new zoning classification for condo towers.

Yamasaki Inc., the world-renowned, Michigan-based architecture firm that designed the World Trade Center, designed La Bella Verde and helped pitch the proposal.

The project seemed to falter last year when a partnership between Hong and several Yamasaki executives broke up.

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