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Another high-rise proposed ***Plan a mix of retail, hotel, residential***

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LAWRENCEVILLE - A new high-rise project has been proposed by the woman in charge of the first one approved in the county, La Belle Verde, which has been continuously delayed.

Kelly Hong would not comment on either project Wednesday, saying her schedule was "really tight" this week.

La Belle Verde was supposed to break ground on two 25-story towers in April. The project, on 4.7 acres on Steve Reynolds Boulevard, is next to Hong's new contribution, Villa More.

That development is on 9.5 acres at the intersection of Steve Reynolds Boulevard and Shackelford Road, adjacent to Interstate 85. It had previously been approved for a 12-story business high-rise known as the Zen Urban Center.

Villa More would feature three 12-story residential towers, a 12-story hotel and a retail and restaurant plaza. It would have 294 units.

The plan is scheduled to be heard by the planning commission in September, attorney Michael Sullivan said, but will likely be put off because the project is a development of regional impact, and therefore requires review by the Atlanta Regional Commission and other agencies.

Sullivan said the towers are shorter than Hong's other offering because the additional land allows for more space to build out, instead of up.

The new project is a better fit for the area, he said, because its location next to the interstate will allow for easy marketing and easy access.

"It's going to be very visible," Sullivan said. "This will be one of the catalyst properties for other high-rise developments."

In December, internationally renowned firm Yamasaki Architecture pulled out of La Belle Verde and Hong, a former partner with the group, formed Yamasaki Development to build the high-rise. Keith Kim, the company's vice president of development, said in March that the group was finalizing Australian financing for the project. The company has not commented on the project since then, despite several requests.

Sullivan said he does not think La Belle Verde's hardships will influence commissioners' decisions regarding Villa More. He said those issues are business problems that have nothing to do with land use.

"It's a very exciting project," Sullivan said. "It's a really exciting combination of amenities and living."

Joe Allen, the director of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District, has been advocating for high-rises to bring residents to the CID.

He said Villa More is the type of development necessary for the area.

"We really just need one of these to get started," he said. "It's the spark we need. We need someone to start breaking ground, start moving dirt."

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