
High-rises may replace Macy's

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By Douglas Sams
Staff Writer
doug.sams@gwinnettdaily.com

DULUTH - More than a year ago, developer George Thorndyke pitched his idea to build a 16-story condo tower beside the former Gwinnett Place Macy's.

About 14 months later, the Macy's building is still standing - and still vacant. Many in the area's real estate crowd, especially those leading the aging retail district's face-lift, want to know what Thorndyke will do.

Thorndyke said he is putting the finishing touches on a \$100 million project that will include two 25-story condo towers, each with about 150 units, on the nearly 16-acre Macy's site.

He said the high-rises are cosmopolitan and stunning, a development created to grab the attention of affluent young professionals and wealthy empty nesters.

He aims to submit formal plans to the Gwinnett County Planning division by August.

Whether the old Macy's stays or goes is still unclear, though Thorndyke said he prefers to blend the building into a development that may include offices and a parking deck.

Making a statement

Such an enterprising project needs a constant river of money flowing into it, and Thorndyke said he's found one, an established financial partner with a long history in Atlanta real estate. The group once focused on apartments, then retail and now high-rises. Thorndyke didn't identify the financial partner.

Although little has changed at the Macy's since Thorndyke first announced his plans, much has changed in the area.

In recent months, Gwinnett Place business leaders have formed a self-taxing district. They plan a series of upgrades to the area, one of the first to develop in the initial wave of residential and commercial growth that hit the county in the early and mid-1980s.

The additional tax levy in the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District, or CID, will fund new sidewalks, refurbished streetscapes and transportation improvements.

Another group wants to build two 25-story condo towers on Steve Reynolds Boulevard near Interstate 85. More developers have expressed interest in similar projects.

Getting everyone
on the same page

Gwinnett Commissioner Lorraine Green, whose district covers the Gwinnett Place area, said she wants to see everyone form a comprehensive plan.

"We need to make sure everyone is on the same page," she said.

"We're not competing enough against Cobb or DeKalb," Thorndyke said. "To many, we're still just a county with a lot of people and a lot of homes. I'm talking about this county competing economically. Our developments, our big projects, need to draw attention. That's what I'm trying to do."