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## County nixes mall high-rise

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LAWRENCEVILLE — A high-rise development proposed in the Gwinnett Place Mall parking lot was denied Tuesday, but county leaders said they are still in favor of projects that would rise above the current skyline.

The Grand at Gwinnett would have boasted two 25-story towers in the parking lot of the old Macy's building at the mall, but after the project was tabled four times, county commissioners decided to deny it without prejudice.

Attorney Michael Sullivan, who represents developer George Thorndyke, said Thorndyke will likely challenge that decision in the next month.

"More likely than not, we will pursue litigation," he said. "I think the applicant is looking at all his options."

Denying the request without prejudice simply means that the decision cannot be used as precedent to deny other high-rises in future zoning cases, County Commissioner Lorraine Green said. A new project on the 4.05-acre tract could come before the board after a year.

Green said she believes high-rises will have a place in the area surrounding the mall but did not see how plans for The Grand were integrated with Gwinnett Place.

"Revitalization is out with the old, in with the new. There was no out with the old here," she said. "This was not done in conjunction with an overall plan. We do not want to repeat the same mistakes we made 20 years ago. If we go 25 stories, the mistake stands out a lot more."

Gwinnett County has been criticized in the past for growing quickly without having a land-use plan in place, Green said.

Joe Allen, the executive director for the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District — where the high-rise would have been located — said members of his group's board will meet Wednesday to discuss, among other things, a redevelopment plan for the CID.

Allen said he still believes the mall area will be the urban core of Gwinnett County and has heard rumors about as many as six possible high-rise developments that are in the works. Green confirmed that she had spoken to developers about six buildings ranging from three to 25 stories but would not

"We cannot function and be successful without citizen involvement," Walters said, adding that officers are trying to reach out to non-English speakers, who often don't know the community standards and are fearful of police. "We've got to make sure the newly arrived people in this county get involved."

Officials are still working on setting up an office for the unit, but leaders have said they want to find a location in either the Gwinnett Village or Gwinnett Place community improvement districts, blighted areas where business owners have banded together to make improvements.

Walters said he expects the transition for the unit to be complete long before the April 30 deadline set by commissioners, although he said a complaint hotline and ability to take online complaints could take longer.

"It's a big day, but it's a step in the process. We're not there yet," Commissioner Mike Beaudreau said of the announcement Tuesday. "That's a huge increase (in resources), and that's what voters wanted us to do, to put law and order No. 1."