

[gwinnettdaily.com](http://www.gwinnettdaily.com)

Print page

Back

High-rise rules to remain strict

07/16/2006 -

By Bryan Brooks

Staff Writer

bryan.brooks@gwinnettdaily.com

LAWRENCEVILLE — If the first one is any indication, high-rise rezonings in Gwinnett County won't get a free pass.

Twin condo towers that would go on the edge of the Gwinnett Place business district were recently endorsed by county planning commissioners, but not before they put their stamp on the project in the form of zoning conditions. The conditions are extra requirements developers must meet in exchange for getting their land rezoned, and in this instance some of them are uncommon or larger than usual, reflecting the project's scope.

For instance, the Michigan firm behind the condo towers slated for a small, wooded tract on Steve Reynolds Boulevard near Interstate 85 would have to contribute \$50,000 to the county for fire service.

Planning Chairman Eric Johansen said the requirement came about after he spoke with fire officials about the high-rise plans. They told him a fire in one of the 25-story structures would require a sizable chunk of the county's fire-fighting manpower.

"If there was a fire in that building they would have to dedicate two-thirds of a county shift to fight it" Johansen said. "What that tells me is that in these high-rise districts, additional fire support services are going to be needed."

Another condition would require the developers, Yamasaki Associates, to give \$60,000 to a Gwinnett Place business group so it can plant trees in the district.

Yamasaki is asking the county to let it shrink a mandated 85-foot buffer on the edge of the property down to five feet, and the money would offset trees that would be lost in the process, Johansen said.

One that has caused acute consternation for the developers, though, deals with roads.

Yamasaki's plans call for two 300-foot-tall towers holding 263 condo units. That would change if Yamasaki is unable to build a second driveway for the development.

As proposed, the towers would only have one entrance on Steve Reynolds Boulevard, but a concrete median would only allow residents and shoppers to turn right out of the site.

Those wanting to reach nearby I-85 would have to make a U-turn at the next traffic light and backtrack.

Because of the traffic problems that could result, planning commissioners are calling for the project to be limited to one 20-story tower with a maximum of 200 units. However, if Yamasaki can link the site to another nearby street, its project size would not be trimmed.

Two regional agencies that reviewed the project because of its size — the Atlanta Regional Commission and the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority — also noted a second drive is needed.

For a second drive to become reality, Yamasaki must reach a deal with adjacent property owners whose land separates it from either Club Drive or Shackleford Road.

Yamasaki's attorney, Lee Tucker, said although the requirement is unwarranted, the developer is trying to gain access to one of the roads.

"We are communicating with our neighbors," said Tucker, who refused to characterize how the process is going.

Johansen said the county's policy has been to limit any subdivision that does not have a second entrance to 200 homes, and the high-rises are being held to that standard.

Either way, Yamasaki has gone out of its way to work with planning commissioners, Johansen said.

"We feel Yamasaki is the proper group to do a development of this magnitude," Johansen said. "They have the credentials and the background and experience necessary to pull this off, and if anybody is going to do it, we're pleased it's going to be them.

"It just comes down to is it the right project for that site."

The zoning conditions should be considered precedent setting for any future high-rises, Johansen said.

Tucker questioned whether they could cause some deals to fall apart.

"To me it would seem to inhibit the ability of future high-rises to bear fruit," he said.

"My client is going to set the standards for all subsequent high-rises in Gwinnett County, and we believe that is a high benchmark and appropriately so for those projects that follow."

The Gwinnett County Commission, which has the final say on rezonings and their conditions, is scheduled to vote on the high-rise request on July 25.