

DEVELOPER RETOOLS W. BLOOMFIELD PLAN AFTER COURT DENIAL

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A Bloomfield Hills developer is hatching a new plan for a controversial site in West Bloomfield Township.

Thomas Vestevich - with the help of Terry Stamper, a development consultant at T.L. Stamper and Associates L.L.C. in Birmingham - is considering a mixture of retail and office space, townhouses and single-family homes on 16 acres at the southeast corner of Maple and Haggerty roads.

Real estate brokers say the office and residential parts of the developer's concept were created solely to placate residents. Marc Newman, an attorney from Mantese, Miller and Mantese P.L.L.C. in Troy who is representing residents, said the developer is trying to squeeze out nearby residents.

In April, Oakland County Circuit Judge David Breck quashed Vestevich's plans to build a strip mall on the same site.

``There was a history of litigation on the site dating back 10 years, said township planner Thomas Bird. He said that in 1988, Vestevich and the township had an agreement on a strictly retail concept for the site.

But some residents opposed having a 110,000-square-foot strip mall on property zoned for single-family homes, Bird said.

In 1991, Breck ruled the property would remain residential. The developer appealed and prevailed in the state Court of Appeals.

But earlier this year, residents of Gas Light Village and Bloomfield Pines, both next to the site, filed a motion to invalidate the agreement between Vestevich and the township. Judge Breck then quashed that agreement.

Vestevich said it is too early to discuss the project. Stamper, the development consultant, said the plan is not for a strip mall but for a ``creative, town-center approach." He declined to elaborate further.

However, said township planner Bird, the concept presented by the developer to the West Bloomfield Planning Commission has 100,000 square feet of retail, 35,000 square feet of offices and an undetermined number of townhouses and single-family homes.

Joel Feldman, vice president of Friedman Real Estate Group Inc. in Farmington Hills, said a 35,000-square-foot office is a token building.

``As valuable as that intersection is, the office seems to be a throw-in to ... get this (project) accepted," Feldman said.

Russell Barnett, vice president and director of the retail service group at the Grubb & Ellis Co. office in Southfield, said, ``The developer would be prudent to select an upscale grocery store and complement it with upscale boutiques.

Although Feldman and Barnett see great potential for the high-growth Haggerty corridor, they question the size of Vestevich's plan.

Newman, the residents' attorney, also is skeptical. He suspects the developer wants to buy the 10-12 homes in Gas Light Village. Feldman said the retail and office portions would use about 13.5 acres, if the developer were to

use traditional square footages. ``There would be very little residential that could exist on 2.5 acres," he said.

The cost to develop high-end retail and office space, Feldman said, could be about \$10.5 million. This does not include residential property, landscaping and parking, he said.

But Stamper said the plan is not firm. He would not comment on the fate of existing homes in the area.

``All we have done so far is ask the planning commission's view on a concept," Stamper said. The commission has requested more housing than was shown in the developer's concept, he said.

Bird said the majority of the commission wants to see more refinements in the developer's plans. He also urged Vestevich and Stamper to seek opinions from adjacent business owners and residents.

``We expect to see a more refined plan in about a month," Bird said.

The property, still zoned residential, would need to be rezoned before the developer could proceed. Currently, the township doesn't have a mixed-use zoning ordinance for one parcel of property. The planning commission plans to wait to see whether the project has any support before it considers creating a new zoning ordinance, Bird said.

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