



THE PLAIN DEALER

Developer Bob Stark drops Solon plans

One lifestyle center proposal remains

Monday, January 14, 2008

Laura Johnston
Plain Dealer Reporter

Solon- Developer Bob Stark has surrendered.

That leaves Peter Rubin, president of the University Heights-based Coral Co., as the only contender to build Northeast Ohio's newest lifestyle center.

Last fall, both submitted proposals to create complexes of shops, restaurants, condos, hotels, movie theaters, college classrooms, medical and business offices along SOM Center Road.

The City Council was to pick a project Jan. 22, with residents to vote on necessary rezoning in November.

But Stark Enterprises pulled out after Gross Builders - which had planned to build about 250 senior housing units as part of Stark's 75-acre, \$750 million Garden District development - withdrew from the project and took its 27 acres out of the mix. Stark could no longer deliver the mixed-use development he had proposed.

"I was surprised," said Councilman Ed Kraus, whose ward encompasses both proposals. "The decision has somewhat been made for us. . . . Now we'll have more time to focus in on it."

Stark's withdrawal came Thursday in a letter addressed to the city.

"As a result of Gross Builders' decision to withdraw from the joint venture, we have determined that we are unable to proceed with our proposed Garden District project," Stark wrote.

Gross, which had prior approval from the city, will still construct the housing on its 27 acres on Aurora Road.

"The fact remains that our agreement with the city requires us to move forward now with our plans to build a housing development to serve senior citizens in Solon," owner Harley Gross said in an e-mail.

Kraus said Sunday he was disappointed. So was Stark.

"It came at the last minute," Stark said. "We'd like to be a contributor to the quality of life there."

What will happen with the plan's remaining 48 acres, which included apartments and the Solar Shopping Center at the southeast corner of Aurora and SOM Center roads, is anyone's guess.

On Sunday, Mayor Kevin Patton suggested Stark might make over the dated strip mall - something like Stark's Eton, Chagrin Boulevard, he said.

Stark would like to redevelop it if the current owner chooses to do so, he said. But right now, he's focusing on redeveloping the Warehouse District downtown.

So Solon officials are concentrating on the Coral plan, a 90-acre, \$500 million complex to replace 70 homes and 45 commercial acres on SOM Center Road, between Bainbridge and Solon roads. A portion of the land is owned by developer Scott Wolstein, who is known for plans to remake the Flats and a proposal to bring major league soccer to Macedonia.

"A gateway to the city" is how Kraus characterized it.

"It certainly has a lot of good components to it," he said. "The biggest drawback is it's taking residential land and making it commercial. That will be the biggest challenge."

Kraus and Patton spoke of taking time to work with Rubin, now that there's no deadline to decide on a developer. They want to address traffic and drainage issues and minimize impact on the nearby neighborhoods.

"You want everyone to be happy with the project and be proud of it," Kraus said.

Rubin could not be reached for comment Sunday.

But Linda Reed, whose Sharondale Drive house would be replaced by the complex, said she hopes the plan is approved soon. Like 64 other homeowners, she has signed an agreement for Coral to buy her home for more than market value, she said.

"It's a shot in the arm to this city," Reed said. "What he's proposing to build here is going to be beautiful."

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:

ljohnsto@plained.com, 216-999-4115

© 2008 The Plain Dealer

© 2008 cleveland.com All Rights Reserved.