

Lauderhill planning growth around park

By Juan Ortega
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LAUDERHILL ? The city is getting ready for its own version of Extreme Makeover.

Several multimillion-dollar projects -- including a gospel museum, an upscale shopping/arts district, residential developments and an updated mall -- are planned or proposed around Central Broward Regional Park on Sunrise Boulevard and State Road 7.

The 97-acre county park, scheduled to be completed about this time next year, will feature a 5,000-seat stadium for cricket and other sports, an aquatic center, a nature area, basketball and tennis courts and picnic areas.

Some residents said they wonder whether anything will really change in the area, but officials hope the proposed projects will add thousands of jobs and perhaps millions of dollars to the city's coffers.

"This redevelopment is in a relatively small geographic area, but it's going to benefit not only the nearby properties but all of Lauderhill," said Don Giancoli, director of the city's Community Redevelopment Agency.

He said the State Road 7 corridor reels in about \$1 million in property taxes each year. "We would like to see that double or triple within the next five to 10 years -- and it's quite feasible," Giancoli said.

Among planned or proposed projects:

The \$100 million Caribbean-themed Carishoca, an upscale center of stores and restaurants expected to add hundreds of jobs when it opens in mid-2008. The city has endorsed it going on the old 13-acre site of Kmart at 1010 NW 40th Ave. The city is considering allowing on the same site TapTap City, a \$107 million project that would feature art galleries and eateries and an educational area with a media library, performing arts center and museum for Creole culture.

320 Caribbean-style townhouses at Georgetown Homes and 116 British Colonial-style townhouses at St. James Luxury Town Homes. Prices for the units would vary from \$250,000 to \$340,000. Georgetown is under construction and St. James is expected to break ground next year. Both will replace lots that were vacant for years north of the park.

A third, unnamed residential community with more than 100 townhouses is expected to be built on part of a 10-acre lot formerly owned by McArthur Dairy at 1101 N. State Road 7.

The Lauderhill Town Center project, an overhaul of the Lauderhill Mall at 1267 N. State Road 7. The mall should get improvements by 2008, and plans call for its replacement before 2014. Vander Ploeg and Associates, a Boca Raton-based architecture firm, is designing residences, shops and offices for the center.

The Lauderhill Town Square project, which calls for 82 condominiums and 21,000 square feet for businesses on a four-acre site just north of Northwest 19th Street and State Road 7.

Internationally renowned entertainer Bobby Jones favors the city's old McArthur Dairy site for his proposed \$45 million gospel museum.

The plans are not without skeptics.

Randy Fitchhorn saw a sign advertising \$250,000-plus townhouses a few blocks south of the gas station where he works and where he often sees drug deals and arrests.

"You're telling me that people are going to pay that much, when right across the street they've got tenements and controlled housing? They want to make Lauderhill something that it's not," Fitchhorn said.

But half the new townhouses have already been sold, with some occupied and others under construction, said Steve Margolis, chief operating officer for Centerline Homes, the developer of Georgetown Homes.

Lenora Clark, a Lauderhill resident of about 14 years, had reservations about the city's plans, but is supportive.

"I think it can help the economic situation [and] bring more jobs," she said. "My only concern is traffic congestion. It's already a problem with the 441 corridor."

Although no studies have determined exactly how much money the city would get if all the projects are completed, City Manager Charles Faranda said residents will have some say in how the new revenue is spent.

Some of the new tax money must be used for increased police and fire-rescue services, Faranda said.

Giancoli said the property values of nearby homes are expected to increase, but homestead exemptions and state laws should protect homeowners from being priced out of their own neighborhoods.

He said the city wants to address traffic concerns by adding buses, streetlights and roads parallel to State Road 7. Other roads will be widened, including Northwest 16th and 17th streets, Giancoli said.

City Vice Mayor Dale Holness said he is sure the redevelopment in Lauderhill will benefit all of Broward County.

Clustering the park with stores, eateries and museums will make the area "an international destination," Holness said.

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