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COCONUT GROVE

Grand Village plan still has some wrinkles

Many have called the proposed Grand Village complex the hope for a struggling Village West, but some say a few details still need to be ironed out with the developer.

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The Pointe Group developers want to build a six-block, mixed retail, office and residential complex on Grand Avenue, in Coconut Grove.

The development group planning to build a massive retail, office and residential complex on Grand Avenue learned it still has some wrinkles to iron out after it presented its project to two city advisory boards last week.

On Wednesday, the city's Planning Advisory Board voted 7-1 to defer a vote over a land-use change that, if approved by the Miami City Commission, would allow developer Pointe Group Advisors to begin construction on the two western-most blocks of the six-block project.

"You're very close, but you're not quite there yet and need a little more time," said board member Ernest Martin.

According to the developer, the proposed Grand Village would include about 150,000 square feet of retail space, part of which would be a grocery store.

Nearly 500,000 square feet in office space is planned as well as 113 apartments, and 30 houses and 25 townhomes are planned as a buffer to separate from the surrounding neighborhoods.

Pointe Group requested the land-use change in part to allow the construction of an underground parking garage.

But weary of extending commercial development into residential neighborhoods -- a move which city planners were against -- the board directed the developer to meet with the city's zoning department to see if there were other ways to allow underground parking.

For some, the development represents an opportunity to provide the jump-start to a stalled Village West economy centered around Grand Avenue.

"This is probably the only way Grand can be revitalized," said Henry Givens, president of local development group Grovites United to Survive.

Developer Andy Parrish, whose office is on Grand Avenue, urged the audience to get behind the project.

"I've waited for this for 14 years," he said. ``If you delay it we're going to get a worse project."

But while some say they can't wait for the project to begin, others still have concerns.

Cecilia Holloman, director of the nonprofit Urban Empowerment Corp., said the community would like to know that jobs will go to locals and housing won't be so expensive that no one from Village West can afford to live there.

"This is a great opportunity, but an opportunity that should be approached very carefully," she said.

On Thursday, while presenting the project to the Cocoanut Grove Village Council, project architect Max Strang, one of several Grove residents on the development team, said the project is close.

"We know there are a few issues," he said. ``We're actively working on that. By and large, I feel we have a lot of support."

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As for housing, Pointe Group president and Grove resident Peter Gardner said there will be reasonable rental units and workforce housing, though it is too early to say how many units.

As for the residents of the 189-occupied apartment units currently standing where Grove Village will be built, Gardner said he has hired a consultant to help them relocate in and out of the Grove. Some will be able to stay, others won't, he said.

And for many in Village West, ensuring that residents will be around to enjoy Grove Village is still a top priority.

Pierre Sands, president of the Village West Homeowners and Tenants Association, said Gardner is a "kind, genuine and honest man," but added that he wants assurances that the people in the community will still be there after Grove Village is completed.

"We don't want to stand in the way of progress, but we don't want to be rolled over by it either," he said.

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