

Daytona Beach News - Journal article - 1/5/07

River towers to include condo, hotel

By **JOHN BOZZO**

Staff Writer

DAYTONA BEACH -- Kathy Steyermaier likes the idea of luxury condo and hotel towers going up near her beachside home.

"Are they going to have a nice restaurant and cocktail lounge?" she asked. "I think it will be a good addition to the neighborhood."

Sam Morris, who lives in the nearby Halifax Villa Apartments, is critical.

"I'm not much for change," he said. "It seems like every time something new comes in, it's not something I value."

A South Florida developer has proposed a new \$300 million vision for the gateway to the beachside.

It's a tall vision.

Blue Water VI of Fort Lauderdale wants to build a 27-story condo-hotel and 30-story residential condominium at the northeast corner of the Broadway Bridge on East International Speedway Boulevard.

"I think that is a fantastic project," said Virginia Brown, a member of the Main Street-South Atlantic Avenue Redevelopment Area Board, who lives two blocks from the site. "It will be a real welcoming sign as people come across the bridge."

Preliminary plans include 350 condo-hotel rooms and 170 residential condominium units, a marina and 60,000 square feet of retail, including two restaurants facing the Halifax River and a promenade with shops fronting East International Speedway Boulevard.

Town houses are planned on the north end of the site as a transition to the residential neighborhood.

Since the Broadway Bridge opened in 2001, city leaders have wanted to give drivers a new vision of the beachside instead of the aging buildings visible from the high-rise span.

Now that a plan has been proposed, it will face a growing resistance locally to tall buildings.

Ormond Beach and Edgewater voters rejected tall buildings in November.



Artist's rendering of what a proposed hotel and condominium project, slated for the northeast corner of the Broadway Bridge on International Speedway Boulevard, would look like. The developer's plan calls for a 27-story hotel and a 30-story condo building.

Planning Board members in Daytona Beach have discussed limiting the height of riverfront buildings, but the proposal never moved ahead.

"I think it would be ideal from what I see thus far," said Frank Heckman, chairman of the Main Street-South Atlantic Redevelopment Area Board, which will review the plan next week.

But, he added, "Quite a few questions will be raised to the developer."

Dave Lamotte, a redevelopment board member, has questions about the impact on the neighborhood.

"How are they going to get traffic in and out of that thing?" he asked. "Halifax (Avenue) is a little road."

Michael O'Leary of Blue Water said his company plans to conduct a traffic study to answer those questions. He's looking forward to working with the city and residents.

"We feel we have come in and taken a neglected and sort of forgotten area and are trying to put this plan together to turn it around," he said.

He described the project as a resort destination.

Blue Water bought all the properties needed for construction, starting with the Haigh-Black Funeral home for \$2.7 million in 2005. The final property deal was completed last month with Blue Water paying \$1.2 million to Steven and Jerilyn Vasilaros for their waterfront home, according to Volusia County public records.

O'Leary said the company demolished buildings after noticing "vagrants" and suspected drug deals in the vacant and dilapidated structures.

"That's why we tore down those structures, so we could eliminate problems in the neighborhood," he said.

Blue Water has no plans to ask the city for money to help build the project, he said. O'Leary said the condo-hotel market is strong and he expects the residential condo market to rebound by the time it will take to submit plans to the city and get environmental approvals.

Construction could begin in 2008 and take up to two years to complete.

City planners have yet to complete a review the project, but City Manager Jim Chisholm likes what he sees so far.

"It's really kind of exciting," he said. "It's one of the first projects here with all those things together -- residential, condo, commercial."

Shiela McKay, the city commissioner who represents the zone where the project is proposed, said the project is premature until the city has a plan for that area.



She criticized plans for the redevelopment board to consider the project at a meeting at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday because the City Commission meets at 6 p.m. that same night.

"It limits the options that every citizen has for attending meetings," McKay said. "You can only attend one."

Next week's meeting is the first, but not last, public meeting on the project. The redevelopment board will vote on a general outline of the project. In the future, more detailed construction plans will go to the redevelopment board, Planning Board and City Commission.

"There will be three other opportunities for the public to participate and share their opinions on the project," said Susan Cerbone, a city spokeswoman.

john.bozzo@news-jrn.com