

HRT, Developer Partner on Project

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By Philip Newswanger

A proposed used use development for Monticello Avenue in Norfolk has an unusual backer- Hampton Roads Transit, the region's transit authority.

"Our commission has entered into an interim agreement with the developer to determine the viability of the project," said James Toscano, HRT's spokesman.

Concord Eastridge, a Northern Virginia developer, is working with HRT on a plan for the development of 4.5 acres into residences and shops.

The area is bordered on the north by 17th Street, on the south by 14th Street, on the east by Armistead Avenue and on the west by Monticello Avenue.

HRT owns the majority of the property but may have to assemble a few additional properties, whether through a purchase of by other means- such as having the city buy the property and conveying it to HRT.

The Monticello facility houses HRT's administrative and para-transit operations. HRT operates five other facilities, including its headquarters in Hampton and an operations facility at 509-18th St. in Norfolk.

"The property continues the redevelopment of the Monticello corridor, and proposes to provide HRT with a new operations and maintenance facility," Toscano said.

The last major development on Monticello Avenue in this part of town was Bristol Development's condominium and apartment complex directly across the street.

The Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, at the urging of Norfolk City Council, attempted to revitalize the upper portion of Monticello Avenue near Coca Cola's Mid-Atlantic Bottling plant through the condemnation of land. But the case ended in General District Court. Eventually, the Virginia Supreme Court ruled in favor of the property owner, a junkyard owner.

Since then, condemnation laws have been toughened in the aftermath of a U.S. Supreme Court case that pitted a neighborhood against the city of New London, Conn.

The developer is expected to determine which properties are needed for the project. Project financing, possibly with a combination of private and public dollars, is still under discussion.

"The due diligence involves what properties might have to be bought and the size of the footprint," Toscano said.

Toscano said the proposal is the outcome of the HRT's commission adopting guidelines based on the Public-Private Education Facilities and Infrastructure ACT of 2002, known as PPEA. The law allows organizations like HRT to partner with the private sector for a board range of development projects.

The project hasn't been announced yet. But a few details have emerged.

The retail component of 58,000 square feet of ground level, most of it facing Monticello Avenue, will be for shops, restaurants and possibly a grocery store. Plans also call for 121 parking spaces underneath the building.

On top will be seven residential towers, separated by an atrium landscaped with ornamental trees, trellises and gazebos.

"This will be the main attraction, and it is anticipated that it will be heavily used by the tenants and their visitors," according to a design narrative by RRMM Architects of Norfolk.

Each residential tower will be four stories high and will have 210 apartments for rent – 75 percent will be two-bedroom units; 15 percent, one-bedroom units; and 10 percent, three-bedroom units.

There will be a 1,000-space parking garage.