

## **Center may house apartments, hotel**

### **Proposal for development at 161st St., U.S. 31 could expand to 80 acres and push back groundbreaking to next spring**

**By Francesca Jarosz**

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Westfield's first major mall development, planned as a high-end shopping center, could add apartments and a hotel to the mix of mostly restaurants and retail.

Lantern Commons, which encompasses 62 acres at the intersection of 161st Street and U.S. 31, also could expand to 80 acres.

Developer Barry Herring of Pine Tree Commercial Realty will announce these potential changes Monday in a meeting with members of the Westfield Washington Chamber of Commerce.

In light of the changing plans, groundbreaking for the site likely could be pushed back from this fall to next spring. The goal would be to still open Lantern Commons in December 2009, but the later kickoff date could push the opening back to early 2010.

Herring said residential developers Flaherty & Collins and prospective hotel owners approached him in recent months to express interest in the site.

"We kind of slowed down a little bit and said, 'Boy, this does make sense,' " Herring said. "People don't like to see generic shopping centers going up."

Herring said he's been in serious discussions with the potential investors, but no agreements have been signed at this point.

Meanwhile, Pine Tree has an option to buy 15 homes in the Woodside Estates neighborhood north of the property. Residents there have signed contracts and a price has been set, but the developer doesn't expect to make the deals final until mid-June, Herring said.

Purchasing those homes would allow Pine Tree to expand the site by 18 acres, giving

more space for additional residences and the hotel, which would be an extended-stay venue.

Developers have drafted dozens of possible site plans with the new additions.

The apartments could be located above or adjacent to the retail stores to give the development a more urban feel, said Chris Kirles, a developer at Flaherty & Collins who has been in discussions with Herring.

The number of apartments that would be in the development has not been determined, but Kirles said a typical project includes 200 to 250 units.

Herring said he hopes to firm up plans for the site -- as well as retail tenants -- also by mid-June.

Despite the waning economy, he said interest in the development has remained strong.

Kirles said his group was drawn to the site because of its location along U.S. 31 and the growth they foresee in Westfield.

With similar concepts popping up in nearby communities such as Carmel, the residential and retail mix is something Kirles said would work there.

"A lot of mixed-use development isn't just a fad, but it's something we're going to see a lot of," Kirles said.

City leaders say they also like the idea of mixed use in the development, which will provide a major boost to the city's tax base.

"There's where I see a lot of development going today," said Mayor Andy Cook. "We have nothing like that in Westfield at this point."

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