

Project could get center back in gear

An Indiana developer has proposed a rental housing and retail project for Ramsey Town Center.

By **JIM ADAMS**, Star Tribune

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Ramsey officials have received a large housing-and-retail proposal that they hope will be a breakthrough for the stalled Ramsey Town Center.

An Indiana company has proposed building a complex with more than 200 upscale rental units above street-level stores; it would be near the city's four-story parking ramp in the heart of Town Center. The center has languished since 2006 when the original developer went broke and banks foreclosed on the project.

Three City Council members and two city officials recently visited Indianapolis to see apartment complexes built by the developer, Flaherty & Collins Properties.

In response to Flaherty's proposal, the council has guaranteed that the city will work

exclusively with the company on the 4-acre site for six months while the firm works out construction plans and costs, said City Administrator Kurt Ulrich. He estimated the project would cost \$6 million to \$8 million.

If a deal is struck, "I would say it will be a significant breakthrough," Ulrich said. "It would bring a first-class apartment complex to the city core."

Veteran Council Member Dave Elvig agreed it would be a breakthrough. "It's a very difficult element to produce, because first, it is housing in a bad housing environment, and more important, it is a mixed-use concept in an outer-ring suburb. Local developers have told us no way," Elvig said.

Mayor Bob Ramsey said he was impressed with the upscale Flaherty apartment complex that city officials toured in their one-day trip to Indianapolis in late November.

Officials said Flaherty's proposal is to build on both sides of Sunwood Drive, which passes in front of City Hall. The project would have first-floor shops with apartments above that would have common areas, a fitness center and other amenities. Ramsey said rents would likely be more than \$1,200 a month for the units.

Ulrich said the 600-stall municipal ramp could be expanded to the west as part of the project, which includes a skyway over Sunwood Drive. He said the city has a \$3.5-million federal grant for a ramp expansion. Ulrich said another skyway could eventually carry tenants from the parking ramp to a potential Northstar commuter station.

Another upcoming Town Center project is a medical clinic to be built by Allina Hospitals and Clinics on land owned by Jim Deal. Allina plans to break ground next spring on the 23,000-square-foot clinic, which will replace a smaller one that Allina will close on Alpine Drive in Ramsey, said spokeswoman Gloria O'Connell.

The clinic would be the first new construction in Town Center since the city bought the remaining 148 undeveloped acres for more than \$6 million in June from banks that foreclosed on a loan to the original center developer.

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