

Greater Denver

Thornton revitalizes city's old commercial center

by Jill Jamieson-Nichols

Thornton is continuing efforts to breathe new life into what once was the city's primary commercial area with plans for redevelopment of 13.59 acres at the southeast corner of 88th Avenue and Washington Street.

The Thornton Development Authority, made up of City Council, is requesting proposals for redevelopment of the property, which currently contains a boarded-up Church's Fried Chicken restaurant, an old shopping center and smaller strip center, restaurant, liquor store, nightclub, child care facility and "a lot of vacant, unused land," said Gary Gaglia, assistant economic development director.

The redevelopment is part of an effort to revitalize Thornton's old commercial center, which extends along Washington from about 84th to 104th avenues.

Requests for proposals are being sought through March 22, after which the development authority will select a developer to acquire and redevelop the site. There currently are six owners.

The site is suited for retail development, and Gaglia said, "One of the intents is to try to keep those (uses) that are viable, like the child care center, on site if at all possible." The development authority also offers benefits to relocating businesses with efforts to keep them in the community, he said.

Several businesses are operating on the property, such as a Mexican food restaurant, the liquor store, nightclub and tenants of a four-unit strip center.

The old shopping center is approximately 80 percent vacant, however, said Gaglia.

Once the heart of Thornton's commercial area, Washington Street has suffered as retail and commercial businesses opted for newer developments. "Right now, it's largely older structures," Gaglia commented.

That is changing with renewal efforts, however. One of the largest is the old North Valley Mall, which First Union has transformed into a 500,000-square-foot office complex that is 75 percent leased. A number of small parcels also are being redeveloped, including a 5 1/2-acre site across the street from the 13.59 acres in the RFP process. The authority is assisting developer Rivinia in acquisition of the property for development of a Walgreens and three other retail uses, possibly including a coffee shop and video store.

Another five acres have been acquired by Gateway Partners four blocks to the south at 84th and Washington. The site is being targeted for restaurant and retail uses.

Further north at the edge of the old town area, the city is looking toward possible future development of a site that contains an older Target store. Target wants to build a superstore, which the site cannot accommodate. "They're going to leave a big void there," Gaglia said, adding the anticipated relocation will offer the city an opportunity to redevelop 30-year-old properties

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DIA floats WorldPort

Denver International Airport will seek City Council approval of special facilities financing to get the \$60 million WorldPort air-cargo complex off the ground.

The financing is for projects that qualify for tax-exempt issuance but are backed by revenues from the project, not by city or airport credit. Along with 15 percent equity from the developer, funds would pay for construction of on- and off-site facilities, including cargo-handling buildings, ramps, etc., said DIA Deputy Manager for Administration and Finance Vicki Braunagel.

WorldPort will be developed by Fulenwider, Prather and Thompson and Aviation Development Services, which finances and develops cargo facilities worldwide.

Erie OKs major development

The town of Erie, which last year turned down a massive new development, has annexed and zoned 922 acres for development of up to 2,494 homes and a million square feet of commercial space.

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