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Unicorp planning Bellagio-like project in Orlando

Developers want to turn 29-acre site around man-made lake into \$100 million project

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by [Jill Krueger](#)

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ORLANDO -- Inspired by the Bellagio Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, a \$100 million planned development in southwest Orlando will feature more than 100 upscale town homes as well as restaurants and shops ringing a man-made lake.

Called Dellagio, the mixed-use project would occupy a 29-acre tract that Unicorp National Development Inc. has under contract for an undisclosed sum from Marcent Florida Inc.

"We thought that a project of that quality and caliber would be a great asset to Central Florida," says Chuck Whittall, Unicorp's co-owner. He and partner Lee Maher got the idea for the project while visiting Vegas, Whittall says.

Fronted by a 12-acre lake on a hillside on the Las Vegas Strip, the AAA Five Diamond award-winning Bellagio features a 3,000-room resort with casino, gourmet and casual restaurants, bars and lounges, water fountains, majestic gardens, entertainment, fine art and shopping.

Bellagio's executives declined comment on the casino-resort's influence on the Orlando project.

On a smaller scale, Unicorp's local undertaking features 135,000 square feet of restaurants and shops, and 118 city homes -- or upscale town homes -- ranging from \$500,000 and up.

Courting Whole Foods

Whittall says the project, which requires a zoning change from the county, also will draw new national retailers to the area, expansions for existing retailers and local brands. Unicorp, for instance, is in serious discussions with Whole Foods Market about bringing a flagship store to the center, he says.

In addition, the retail component will include such tenants as a hair salon and spa, ice cream shop, coffee shop and wine bar. The project, which includes an underground parking garage with 350 parking spaces, also provides for several park-like areas.

The Scott Partnership Architecture Inc. is designing the project's commercial and retail components.

Bordered by Della Road to the east and Sand Lake Road to the south, the land was in the right location for an upscale mixed-use project because of the combination of local and tourist traffic, Whittall says.

According to the Orange County Property Appraiser's Office, the land has a market value of \$3.38 million. The land purchase is contingent upon Orange County approval of a change in the existing zoning from a 300-plus apartment complex to accommodate commercial and residential development.

High-end homes, retail

Zach Steele, a partner in Orlando-headquartered Tasco Development Inc., which has helped Unicorp locate prime land in the past, says new homes in the southwest area of town are in short supply.

Further, he says, "Retail is in high demand, especially for high-end users, which Unicorp tailors to."

Orange County Commissioner Teresa Jacobs says Unicorp's partners have shown her their plans.

"It's an interesting project," Jacobs says.

"I look forward to the public hearing, seeing what public input we have at the time and making a decision."

Maher and Whittall say they intend to seek approval from the county within the next four to six months.

"We have had several meetings with neighbors and the county and believe we will have support for our sought-after zoning," Whittall adds.

If approved, the project will take 14 months to build out, Whittall says.

While Unicorp could have chosen to put the project anywhere in the country, the co-owners say Central Florida was lacking a mixed-use project of Dellagio's stature. "We as local residents are extremely proud to put this project in our backyard," Maher says.

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