

New development lays groundwork for revamping Hilton

By Jennie Miller
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FERNDALE — Ferndale Mayor Robert Porter said one of his goals for 2005 was to help revitalize Hilton despite the city's budgetary crisis.

Last week, with the City Council's approval of plans for a mixed-use development project on the north and south corners of Hilton and Nine Mile, the mayor's wishes took effect.

"I think these plans are marvelous," Porter said of the sale of the two city-owned properties to the Terra Land Group, L.L.C. of Novi, which will erect a customized project featuring 14, two- and three-story live/work units on each side of the street. "I think it's a great step for the development of that part of the city."

The properties were marketed for sale through the Friedman Real Estate Group, and Geoffrey Greeneisen of the Terra Group was almost immediately interested.

"We've been searching for sites in Ferndale for years," he said, naming the city's diversity and recent growth as big draws for further development plans. "We are so excited to have found something here."

The company found its niche in mixed-use development projects with Town Commons in Howell, featuring 420 apartments and townhouses sitting above an expanse of retail shops on over 60 acres of land.

"We thought outside the box with that project," Greeneisen said. "After that, other cities started coming to us and wanting us to do that for them but on a smaller scale."

The Ferndale development will be modeled after a current project underway in Walled Lake. City Manager Tom Barwin spoke with Walled Lake officials, who hold the Terra Group "in the highest regard," he said.

"City officials have advised me that their experience with the Terra Group has been very positive and has helped to stimulate additional mixed-use development in Walled Lake," Barwin said.

The sale of the two properties in Ferndale totals \$305,000. Friedman Group will earn a 6 percent commission, and Porter has requested that \$25,000 off the top of that be set aside to be invested back into the Hilton corridor for purposes such as parking reconfiguration, the possible formation of a business district similar to the Downtown Development Authority, and other such improvements.

"It's been kind of dingy for a few years," Porter said, hoping to change that image.

The city has already begun making minor upgrades by redoing the streets, adding brick pavers and enhancing the street lighting. Porter said there are a few other properties available on Hilton, which will further the development as well as encourage current business owners to work toward improving their own appearance.

"You just need that initial step, and this is it," he said.

"We're hoping this will continue the revitalization of Hilton from Eight to 10 miles," Barwin said.

Porter expressed his appreciation for the effort put forth by the Friedman Group for the successful deal Kevin George put together for the city.

"I don't think we could have done this on our own," he said.

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