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First Street Village plans nearly done

Edison-Ford Square site of business, home development

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Plans for First Street Village, a new development of homes and businesses, are on the verge of taking shape on the site of the old Edison-Ford Square on McGregor Boulevard in Fort Myers.

Edison-Ford, once the city's oldest shopping center, was almost completely demolished two years ago after it was purchased by Cleveland-based Cameratta Properties for more than \$6 million. Cameratta is also building High Point Place, a nearby 32-story high-rise condominium project on the Caloosahatchee River. The first of two buildings is scheduled to open in about a year.

First Street Village has been slower to get off the mark, and drew criticism by city consultant Andres Duany for preliminary plans with buildings as high as 16 stories. Duany — hired to create a redevelopment plan for the entire downtown — favors a pedestrian-oriented neighborhood on the Edison-Ford site with three- to five-story buildings.

The latest plans for First Street Village, submitted to city officials earlier this month, are more in line with Duany's recommendations. Galina Tahchieva, director of town planning for Duany's Miami-based company Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co., said in a May 20 letter to city officials that "In general, the project has evolved into a better solution for this site. The density has been substantially reduced, the volume and the height of the buildings have been scaled down and the overall pedestrian connectivity has been improved."

Nicole De Vaughn, principal planner for the city Development Services Division, noted that First Street now includes no buildings higher than eight stories and a pedestrian plaza created by reducing the number of homes to 337 — below the 372 allowed under the site's current land-use designation. It also would have 93,272 square feet of retail, including

a 39,000-square-foot grocery store, and 42,830 square feet of offices.

"We cannot specify the identity of the grocery at this time. We can say that a deal with them looks very good," said Bob Pekol of VIP Commercial-TCN Worldwide, who represents Cameratta on First Street and also in their purchase of Edison-Ford and the High Point site.

De Vaughn said the city staff will be reviewing the project and expects to have it on the city Planning Board agenda for review by August.

Pekol said he hopes to start marketing both the residential and commercial parts of First Street by the fall.

Meanwhile, the 12-acre site — originally called Boulevard Plaza after it opened in 1960 — consists mainly of a parking lot plus a small commercial building saved for tenants who didn't want to leave.

One of those is Fort Myers Travel, where owner Matt Cular said he's in no hurry to leave and hopes to stay on even after First Village is built.

"We don't know exactly what they're going to be offering us but we'd prefer to stay in the new building," he



The Edison-Ford Square parking lot sits mostly empty. Little work has been performed on the former shopping center site since it was demolished in late 2003. *TODD STUBING/news-press.com*



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said. "Our company has been in downtown since 1947 so we want to keep an active location here."

Meanwhile, he said, "Everything's been going fine for us. We have plenty of parking."