

Masonic Home site to get redeveloped

By SANDRA BAKER
STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER



FORT WORTH -- A Fort Worth real-estate developer, the Mallick Group, confirmed Monday that it is under contract to buy the 200-acre Masonic Home and School site on the city's southeast side and has plans to develop the property with about 500 houses and some shopping centers.

The land, bounded by Wichita and East Berry streets and Mitchell Boulevard, is one of the largest contiguous land tracts in the inner city, said group Chairman Michel Mallick.

Mallick said his plan calls for preserving the 19 acres that hold most of the historic Masonic structures, building houses on 107 acres behind those buildings and setting aside about 63 acres along Berry Street for commercial use.

"This is going to change the makeup of southeast Fort Worth," Mallick said.

Councilwoman Kathleen Hicks, whose district includes the Masonic site, said in a statement that the contract is creating "a renewed sense of hope and opportunity among residents. This is a wonderful example of what happens when an engaged community, the city, and the developer work together in a positive way."

The Mallick Group now will do a due-diligence review of the property, and it could take up to a year to close the deal, said Jim Nyfeler, chairman of the Masonic Home and School's strategic planning committee.

The Masonic Grand Lodge of Texas in December 2004 voted to close the 107-year-old Fort Worth campus because it became too costly to operate.

The home opened in 1899 to care for the widows and orphans of Masons, but it grew to become a school serving economically disadvantaged children.

Although the school graduated its last class in June 2005 and the buildings have been vacant since, the Masonic Home and School continues to place and help children when needed, Nyfeler said.

In addition to entering into the contract with the Mallick Group, the Grand Lodge of Texas has leased mineral rights to Dale Resources, Nyfeler said.

the southwest corner of the property, at Mitchell Boulevard, Mallick said.

"Dale will be using state-of-the-art sound mitigation combined with berm construction which will further minimize neighborhood disturbance," Dale Resources President Larry Dale said in a statement.

Mallick said he will be the property's facilitating developer and that he will work with home builders and commercial developers.

There could be 500 to 600 houses, priced from \$140,000 to just above \$200,000, he said.

Mallick said he will seek a single user for the Masonic structures, such as a nonprofit group or private school.

A few of the structures built since the 1960s will likely be removed, he said.

"This is a high-risk project," Mallick said. "It's been a lot of work, and there's still hard work ahead."

The land is in an area where the Fort Worth City Council is considering creating a tax-increment finance district, under which tax revenue from property value increases or new development is put into a fund to pay for projects inside the district. Because the Masonic Home site is now off the tax rolls, such a district would see a windfall when the land again became taxable.

Mallick is developing Sierra Vista, a 95-acre urban village near East Berry Street and South Riverside Drive, about one mile west of the Masonic site. Sierra Vista will have about 232 houses and some shopping centers.