

Lauraville project developer selected

Retail-office complex OK'd for Harford Rd.

By Lorraine Mirabella

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A two-story shopping and office complex is planned for a key intersection of the Lauraville business district in Northeast Baltimore, the Baltimore Development Corp. said yesterday.

The BDC selected developers JBL Great Baltimore Properties to build the \$1.6 million project in the 4500 block of Harford Road and will begin negotiations to sell the developers the city-owned property. Montebello Crossing will be a 15,000-square-foot building with first-floor shops with outdoor seating and a second floor for studios, offices or other businesses. The project will have 31 parking spaces.

"This will be a nice step forward for Lauraville," where community members had encouraged the city to acquire and redevelop the site of a closed gas station, a 25,000-square-foot site at Harford Road and Montebello Terrace, said M.J. "Jay" Brodie, BDC president.

Lauraville's business district on Harford Road between Echodale Avenue and Parkside Drive is in the midst of a rebirth, with new restaurants and businesses opening. New businesses include Spinster Yarns and Fabrics, Bed-I-Boo children's boutique, Rock Candy, Studio C Jewelry and Great Soul Wellness studio.

"We want Lauraville to be a destination location," Jeffrey Landsman, a principal with Baltimore-based JBL Real Estate LLC, a partner in JBL Great Baltimore, said yesterday in an e-mail. He added that his project would add to business district draws such as the Chameleon Cafe, Alabama BBQ Company and the Red Canoe bookstore and cafe.

BDC's request for proposals last year for the underused parcel had marked the agency's third attempt to attract private development. An earlier request for proposal brought no responses, and a developer chosen in a second round failed

to make the new construction project work financially, Brodie said.

The BDC selected JBL Great Baltimore, a partnership of JBL Real Estate and Alpha Omega Services LLC, from among three competing teams who submitted bids in September. JBL Real Estate, with principals Jeffrey and Jeremy Landsman, specializes in workforce housing, retail district revitalization and stabilizing "slumlord" properties. The company has purchased and renovated more than 30 properties since 2002 and has housing and mixed-use projects under way in Hampden, Station North, Greenmount West, Westport, Brooklyn and Morrell Park. Alpha Omega owns and manages commercial real estate in the area.

Jeffrey Landsman said yesterday the developers would be looking for food, fashion and personal health tenants with offerings such as exercise, yoga, spa services or therapeutic massage. The first floor could accommodate up to six retailers, with a second floor of up to 10 offices, depending on demands for space. He said the goal is to bring in more food and fashion tenants to attract more upscale shoppers as well as Morgan State University students.

Other members of JBL Great Baltimore's team include architect David R. Robbins, Qualex construction Group/Caine Construction as general contractors and leasing by Coldwell Banker Commercial. Brodie estimated the project could take two years to design, finance and build.

Competing proposals had come from ROC Inc., with plans for a two-story retail and office development, and from Schnader Enterprises. Inc., which proposed apartments, retail and offices for Schnader Cos.

An advisory panel put together by BDC with members of Lauraville's business community and neighborhood associations, city officials and BDC board members helped make the selection. The panel noted the financial feasibility of JBL's project and its focus on ground-floor retail as deciding factors.

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