

Washington Business Journal - January 21, 2008

<http://washington.bizjournals.com/washington/stories/2008/01/21/story11.html>

WASHINGTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, January 18, 2008

Abbey Road, MacFarlane come together on project

Washington Business Journal - by [Joe Coombs](#) Senior Staff Reporter

An Arlington developer should know soon whether his first project, a \$75 million infill development near Fort Myer, will get off the ground.

Matt Birenbaum, a principal at **Abbey Road Property Group**, has pulled in a high-profile equity partner -- San Francisco-based **MacFarlane Partners** -- and huddled with neighbors of the project to make it all work. He is waiting on a decision Jan. 26 from the **Arlington County Board**.

The proposal would knock down a pair of strip malls in Arlington's Lyon Park neighborhood and replace them with new retail and residential space.

At a community forum Jan. 12, Birenbaum said about 50 people voiced their opinions. Most in attendance, he said, were ready for something new in the neighborhood.

"We had a bigger turnout than I expected," said Birenbaum, a former executive with Bethesda-based home builder EYA. "I think people are excited about the prospects of change."

The site, at the northwest corner of Route 50 and North Pershing Drive, has one building that houses a Duron Paints store and a pair of restaurants. A neighboring parcel is home to the Lee Shopping Center, which contains the Lee Supermarket, the Royal Lee Bar & Grill, a dry cleaner and other retailers, as well as some vacant storefronts.

Abbey Road paid \$12.5 million for the properties in 2006. The developer plans to demolish the two buildings and replace them with 33,495 square feet of retail, with a specialty grocery store as the anchor tenant. Also included would be 188 apartments, 18 of which would be reserved as affordable housing.

Abbey Road would create 134 parking spaces for the retail tenants and an additional 262 spaces in an underground structure for residents of the apartment complex.

One sticking point in the plan is the historic status of the Lee Shopping Center, which was built



File / Joanne S. Lawton

Neighborhood work: Matt Birenbaum's Abbey Road Property Group expects to get an OK from Arlington County for its \$75 million mixed-use project near Fort Myer.

[View Larger](#)

in 1949. The property is not designated as a historic structure on a local level but is part of a national historic recognition for the Lyon Park neighborhood.

Arlington's historical affairs and landmark review board has voted not to support Abbey Road's project and has called for the preservation of the Lee Shopping Center. But the board does not have authority over the site, and the building's fate will ultimately be up to the Arlington County Board.

MacFarlane Partners sees the property as an important piece of its Washington-area portfolio, said company spokeswoman Julie Chase.

"It will take an underutilized center and improve it to the highest and best use for the community," Chase said. "It seems to be a good hub in that community, and this would create some vibrancy."

Abbey Road will also realign the intersection of Route 50 and North Pershing Drive as part of the plan, as well as replace traffic signals and help pay for new bus shelters at the site. If the county approves the plan, work would begin in later this year and be finished sometime in 2010.

The North Pershing Drive project is Birenbaum's first venture with Abbey Road, which he founded in 2006. The developer is targeting infill projects in the Washington area, particularly those that contain aging retail buildings.

e-mail: jcoombs@bizjournals.com phone: 703/258-0827

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.