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Town Center may develop
Kelly Brooks - Staff Writer

MARIETTA - William Byers came to the City of Atlanta from Roanoke, Va., in 1969 to start a church. But he was turned down three times when he tried to get the zoning.

"They felt like we didn't have enough people to start a church," said Byers, who had gone door to door with his wife, Betty, before finding a group of seven families who shared his vision. "I decided to go out far enough and build my own community so we could build a church."

He found 53 acres just south of Big Shanty Road in central Cobb, about a half-mile from where the interchange to Interstate 75 was being built.

Cobb officials approved Byer's plans. By 1978, the development of Grace Church and Hidden Forest, a neighborhood of 52 homes, was complete.

In 1986, Town Center Mall opened. Then, the Town Center Community Improvement District (CID) was established in 1997 as a self-taxing district to promote infrastructure improvements.

Now, Hidden Forest is sandwiched between Interstates 75 and 575, and it's the only subdivision in the CID.

"During the last 10 years, many changes were taking place in the subdivision because most everything was becoming commercial between the two interstates," Byers said.

Enter Sandy Springs-based Pacific Group, which is aiming to develop its second Cobb crown jewel.

The group spearheaded the development of the \$450 million West Village, which opened at its Atlanta Road and Interstate 285 location in March. Now, under the name Town Center Associates, the group is leading plans to develop a similar mixed-use community where Hidden Forest and Grace Church sit, just north of Town Center Mall.

Byers said within the past five years, he received many inquiries about the property and three serious offers other than the one from Woody Snell, a partner with the Pacific Group and an east Cobb resident.

The Pacific Group, Byers said, had the most capability of building what Cobb County and CID officials had projected for the use of the 53 acres.

Plus, the group was willing to include the church in its development.

"It was an answer to prayer for me," Byers said. "Our church wants a 21st century church. We want to start something different. We want to be where the people are."

The church, now at just under 200 members, unanimously agreed to go forward with the development, Byers said.

Snell said that at total build-out in about 2016, the project would be worth \$445.5 million.

Zoning attorney John Moore said he would request Cobb Planning Commissioners to continue the application on Tuesday. The applicants - formally referred to as Town Center Associates - expect to use an extra 30 days to address neighbors' concerns, which Snell said include the urbanization of the property, traffic and water use.

Snell said he plans to install water-efficient toilets, faucets and showerheads, among other water-saving efforts. He also pointed to one impending traffic solution - the Big Shanty Connector, a 2-mile project that would extend Big Shanty Road.

Currently, the proposed development entails the 31,200 square-foot church, 88 townhomes, 185 senior living units, 160 flats and 1,351 village condos. The condos would be above 134,000 square-feet of retail shops. A 144,600 square-foot office building would be located on a southwest parcel of the development.

Snell said 16 acres of the development would be devoted to greenspace.