

Vacant headquarters may get Town Center zoning

Retail developers form joint venture, analyze potential of Murray property

5:35 PM, Feb. 11, 2011



The Brentwood building that housed the former headquarters of Murray Ohio has been purchased in a joint venture by H.G. Hill Realty and GBT Realty. / Mark Cook / The Tennessean

[Town Center concept was 'downtown' feel](#)

BRENTWOOD — The 100,000-square-foot former headquarters of the Murray Ohio Corp. has stood vacant since the maker of lawn and garden equipment moved in 2005.

But a fall tweak of the rules that govern the Town Center Zoning District has attracted a buyer.

Local development companies H.G. Hill Realty Co. and GBT Realty Corp. have entered into a joint agreement to buy the empty office building, which sits on nearly 12 acres fronting Franklin Road.

"We will immediately begin our analysis of the possibilities in the coming months. While we have no firm plans at this time, we will work together to carefully evaluate the expanded options that the C-4 Town Center District zoning could allow," said H.G. Hill Realty Co. CEO Jimmy Granbery in a prepared statement.

Until recently, the property couldn't have been considered for development under the Town Center guidelines since it was outside the roughly 40-acre area that made up the original commercial district. But that changed in November, when the City Commission unanimously agreed to allow commercial properties within a half-mile radius to use Town Center design standards in redevelopment, but only if landowners and the city agreed to the designation for a particular property.

Update revised restrictions

Among other changes to the restrictions in the zoning area are such things as allowing more rooms in hotels, taller buildings and the elimination of maximum floor-area ratios in favor of more traditional ways to limit density.

The old commercial zoning still applies to the property. If the owners want to change the land to Town Center zoning, they would have to go through a rezoning process, which would include traffic studies to make sure the street system could handle the additional flow of cars at any new venture, said Brentwood City Manager Mike Walker.

"From what we've heard from the board of commissioners and the public is that they wanted to see something happening in Town Center. But the government is not a developer," he said. "We do have certain tools to encourage redevelopment and facilitate it. But in the end, there has to be somebody with the financial wherewithal for a long-term commitment to undertake a project."

Brentwood Mayor Betsy Crossley said it is possible there could be additional updates to the zoning requirements in the Town Center district.

"Our codes are a work in progress so that ordinances turn out the best (they) can be," she said. "This is a good example of making changes for the betterment of the citizens and the community. During the down period, it was a time for us to be very introspective."

Both buyers of the Murray building have previous development experience in Brentwood. Since the 1970s, the Hill company has owned and operated Hill Center — Brentwood, which includes tenants such as Fresh Market, REI, Puffy Muffin and most recently Chipolte and Sweet CeCe's, directly next door to the recently acquired office building.

GBT in 1997 developed the Harris Teeter shopping center directly across Franklin Road from the Murray building. In 2005, the company developed the nearby Brentwood Hills shopping center, anchored by Target, off Old Hickory Boulevard in Davidson County.

The recent building acquisition represents a hopeful sign to Town Center redevelopment advocate Jim Himelrick, CEO of Investors Equity Holdings, which invests in commercial real estate in the area.

"These people are very capable developers. Whatever they do is a good thing," he said.