

Rummell, Balanky Pitch 'Healthy Town' for JEA Site

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Developer Peter Rummell is making a formal pitch to develop his "Healthy Town" concept at the 28.6-acre JEA Southbank site.

He hopes for a home run.

"There really is a big idea here," the Jacksonville businessman and investor said Wednesday, a week before bids were due from developers who want to buy the vacant property.

Rummell considers the idea so big that he is trademarking "The Healthy Town" as well as "Generation H."

Gen H is defined as a growing market of all ages, single and married, families and retirees, who seek "happier, more fulfilling, productive lives" achieved by healthy living that includes their personal habits and living environment."

"We are at the point now where financially it makes sense. Now we have to execute," Rummell said.

Rummell didn't provide an overall investment estimate, but he said it could be \$150,000 per unit. At 1,000 units, and there likely would be more, that indicates an investment of at least \$150 million.

Rummell and Jacksonville developer Michael Balanky are partners in the effort. Balanky said Thursday they formed Elements Development of Jacksonville LLC to do the deal. The company was registered with the state June 16.

"We think there is an opportunity for a huge renaissance on the Southbank," Balanky said.

Balanky leads Chase Properties and has developed retail and residential projects. On the Southbank, near the JEA site, Balanky developed the San Marco Place high-rise condominium and the Kings Avenue Station hotel property.

Balanky said the JEA land along with the neighboring Duval County Public Schools site and the Wyndham hotel property could spark that renaissance.

He also said the proposed redesign of Riverplace Boulevard and the visibility of the property from the St. Johns River and Interstate 95 will spark resurgence.

He said whether or not he and Rummell acquire the JEA site, he hopes the Downtown Investment Authority creates a master plan for the acreage.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do something," Balanky said.

Incubating the Idea

Rummell, who turns 69 on Oct. 13, has been pondering the idea for more than two years, back to when he served as chair of the global Urban Land Institute and its theme of "Building Healthy Places."

"I birthed it out of that," he said.

Rummell's idea is to develop a residential community for all ages that focuses on health of mind, body and spirit — from offering a "base camp" of health and wellness guidance to focusing on designs that encourage activity.

He envisions 1,000 to 1,200 multifamily residential units for sale and for rent as well as the "base camp" and 100,000 to 150,000 square feet of space for retail, food and beverage.

Balanky said the project could accommodate professional office uses and possibly a hotel, making it a mixed-use development.

The “town” would not be life care, as in medical and nursing facilities, although the “Base Camp,” another concept to be trademarked, would offer a health concierge to make physician referrals.

Instead, Healthy Town would provide the elements, facilities, amenities and resources to promote optimal health for its residents.

In addition to bike paths and a fitness center, it would integrate designs that would create “unintentional exercise,” another concept Rummell intends to trademark.

Think stairways, walking and community gardening, for example.

The town would be designed to encourage meaning in life, growth and engagement, peace of mind, beauty, wellness, disease prevention and accident prevention, according to a presentation shared with media.

The “base camp” would be the heart of the town and the community focal point. It would provide services from exercise classes to activity programming to community gardening as well as the health concierge.

Rummell envisions Healthy Town as a concept to attract multiple generations, including baby boomers that want a more meaningful life and to redefine the traditional idea of retirement, and the millennials, who are impatient for a meaningful life and seek a live/work balance.

He also considers it the next paradigm — such as the golf communities and gated developments of decades past.

“Health is going to do to (real estate) value what golf did 40 years ago,” he said in a previous interview.

Bids Due Tuesday

Rummell and Balanky say they will formally bid on the riverfront JEA site.

The bids are due at noon Tuesday and will be opened and names announced at 2 p.m. and posted on the JEA website. No other information will be available until a scoring meeting is held, which is a public meeting, or 30 days from the bid opening, whichever comes first.

Rummell declined to divulge his bid price and was not ready to talk about residential pricing or the overall anticipated investment, other than the expectation the total investment could be \$150,000 a unit.

The entire 42-acre site carries a market value of \$35.6 million, property records show.

Rummell also said if the JEA site didn't work out, he would look elsewhere, although "there aren't a lot of 30-acre sites on the river."

Rummell and Balanky would be the master developers and may or may not do the vertical construction, which would be the structures. Rummell said they expect to hire a general contractor for the horizontal construction, which would be the ground work and site development.

He's holding off on designs until the site is secured. Financing is lined up, he said.

Asked about city assistance that might be requested, Balanky said that has not been addressed. "We will make that decision soon," he said.

Rummell said he didn't know if the team would ask for assistance. "We are aware the city has limited resources," he said.

Rummell and Balanky say their team has included the Dalton Agency advertising, public relations and branding firm; planner Lara Diettrich; architecture, planning and design firm Ervin Lovett Miller; design consulting firm Kimley-Horn; and EnVision Design Engineering.

Balanky said the team has met extensively about the project "over many, many months."

Rummell calls Balanky, 57, the partner with the local development expertise "and a student of the entitlement process." Balanky calls Rummell the visionary.

"Our interests and skill sets are complementary," Rummell said.

Should the bid be accepted, Rummell said it could take a year to start construction. The project would be phased, starting with 250 units and amenities.

"The physical part of it is pretty easy. The programming of it is going to take time," he said.

Rummell said the concept can work across the country, which is why he wants to refine the Jacksonville model. "This one has to be right," he said.

He expects a national marketing campaign for Healthy Town.

"This is a big idea. I think it is a very cool idea," he said. "This is an idea whose time has come."

Rummell has been active in the real estate development industry for more than 40 years, having served as CEO of Nicklaus Companies in Palm Beach, CEO of The St. Joe Co., chairman of Walt Disney Imagineering and vice chairman of Rockefeller Center Management Corp.

He said in March that "Healthy Town" is his next idea.

"I believe with all my heart and soul it is a big idea and I want to be involved with one more big idea before I hang it up," he said.