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New apartments coming to site of old Charlotte Coliseum

By: Adam Rhew

CHARLOTTE -- New life is on the way for the site of the old Charlotte Coliseum off Tyvola Road. An Atlanta developer says work on a massive mixed-use project, which sat on hold because of the recession, could begin as early as this summer.

Pope and Land Enterprises plans to close a deal in June or July that would bring hundreds of apartments to the site, which currently stands vacant. Construction could start within weeks of that agreement.

"You'll see the place come to life then," said Mason Zimmerman, senior vice president at Pope and Land, who has overseen the Charlotte project for years.

Charlotte business leaders say they're pleased to see the project moving ahead.

"The opportunity is to put that property back on the tax rolls at its best and highest use," said Bob Morgan, president of the Charlotte Chamber.

"The Hive," as the coliseum was known to fans, hosted the Charlotte Hornets from 1988 until the team's departure in 2002. It was the source of a bitter battle among the team, politicians and taxpayers about publicly-funded sports arenas. Pope and Land used 550 pounds of explosives to level the building in 2007.

The plan was to build condominiums, apartments, shops, offices and a hotel on the site, to be called City Park. But then the recession hit and the project stalled.

Zimmerman said his firm still believes in the site.

"We spent a year restructuring our venture to keep the project, keep it alive," he said.

The new plans call for a scaled-back version of the original project, fewer units in the first phase, no condos and delayed construction on retail.

Still, Pope and Land is confident the project fills a need in under-developed portion of Southwest Charlotte.

"Historically that 100, 150-acre site has been the hole in the doughnut that kept that market apart," Zimmerman said.

Morgan said the revival of City Park is a positive sign for the region's growth.

"It is very encouraging that the developers are now seeing some opportunity to move forward," he said.

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