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New Development Plans For Southeast Springfield

Reported by: Emily Baucum

The sinking economy has obviously not been kind to the retailers, but that's not keeping a local group from proposing a major development in Springfield.

Real estate planners plan to build an outdoor shopping center on 500 acres along Highway 65 between Battlefield and James River Freeway.

They're hoping to attract businesses that once overlooked the Queen City.

"The Cheesecake Factories and Pottery Barns, when they decide to come to Springfield, they don't have a place to locate," real estate planner Rob Murray says.

He says drivers zip past this empty land along Highway 65. He says it's the perfect place to build the local retail market, and take away some of branson's.

"It's a complete untapped market driving past that," Murray says. "There's no reason we should be giving those property taxes away."

Murray and architect Geoffrey Butler hope to pack 1.5 million square feet of shopping, restaurants and homes onto the grasslands, and say there's no better time to put people to work.

"If you have any needs, now's the time to build because there are people that are very hungry to do work," Butler says.

"We're trying to tee this off so when the market returns, the retailers are going to take their head out of the sand," Murray says.

Murray says cities the same size as Springfield currently have more retail than the Queen City.

"Springfield can support this kind of density when the economy returns," Murray says.

The problem for Springfield has always been road access. A developer will not take on such a large project until the city re-zones the area.

"If you don't set this property up for that developer, they'll never come," Butler says. "A developer will not come in and spend two-and-a-half years figuring out how to get an interchange. That's why that land sat there for so long."



This project has been in the works for 10 years, but is now green-lit because MoDot finally approved construction of roads leading to the center.

"It's the only large tract of ground in Springfield that can attract national retailers on a level that would be a step above what we have now," Murray says.

Murray and Butler say their plan is Springfield's future -- the distant future. Construction won't begin for two to three years, and they're banking on the economy's recovery in that time.

"We know the economy's imploded," Murray says. The odds of it working in the next five years I think are very, very high because it's the only place in Springfield that has the traffic count and the demographics."

The big question of course, will this create jobs? It will in the long run -- by the time the center opens in 10 to 15 years, more than 3,300 jobs will be created. But since construction won't start for a couple of years, this will not be a lifeboat for people who need jobs now.