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ALLSTON BRIGHTON, BROOKLINE

Developer buys Applebee's site in Cleveland Circle, resumes planning for two-site project

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Nearly six months after developers thought they would be unable to negotiate a deal to buy one of two adjacent properties in Cleveland Circle that they intend to redevelop, the company says it signed an agreement last week to purchase the second site.

The Boston Development Group says it will return to its original goal of building a multi-million, mixed-use project, including a 180-room hotel, across two sites where an old, vacant movie theater straddles the Boston-Brookline border and where an Applebee's restaurant sits on neighboring property that is entirely in Boston, according to a spokeswoman for the company.

The project was originally slated as a two-phase endeavor with the cinema site being redeveloped first followed later by work on the restaurant site. But developers now say phasing for the project is not finalized and there is potential for a one-phase project.

Through Boston's large project review process, the city's redevelopment authority held its first community meeting about the project in mid-May. Then, the chief concern among residents – from Brookline, Brighton and nearby Newton – was that the development might not live up to its full potential if it were designed as two separate sites and phases instead of one.

Both sites will be razed and the site's developers plan to build a project highlighted by a 180-room hotel. Past project parameters have also called for retail, restaurant and office space, but the developers, who have returned to planning, say they are currently considering other use options, including replacing the office space component with residential. The originally proposed number of 155 parking spaces may also change. Developers previously estimated the project would cost \$45 million.

In June, developers announced they would submit a new, one-site proposal to the city after the deal to acquire the Applebee's site at 381 Chestnut Hill Ave. fell through the month prior because of looming deadlines in the approval process and differences on the deal's price.

The company's CEO and Chairman David Zussman said then that development of the second and smaller site was cancelled, "unless the [Applebee's site property ownership] comes back to us, but we have no indication that they will."

But, as the Boston Bulletin first reported on Thursday, the Boston Development

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Group was able to negotiate a deal recently. Developers said a deal was signed with a trust that owns the site on Nov. 8.

Past plans have called for a first project phase to be built on the Circle Cinema site, which has addresses of 375 Chestnut Hill Ave. in Boston and 399 Chestnut Hill Ave. in Brookline. The theater closed in 2008 after a 68-year run.

The old plans said 40 the hotel rooms would be on the Brookline side of the first site along with around 18,000 square feet of office space, 8,500 square-feet of restaurant space and 16 parking spots. The other 140 rooms and 102 parking spaces would be built on the site's Brighton side.

Two companies – Hyatt Place and Hilton Garden Inn – were under consideration for the hotel space, development officials said in June. After community concerns, officials said then they were no longer considering the Hampton Inn company.

The second, smaller phase would be constructed on an adjacent plot the Applebee's site. The restaurant chain's lease expires in May 2014, but it is unclear whether the company would stay through the duration of its lease or move out so construction of phase two could start sooner.

According to previous plans, the second phase would replace the restaurant with a 39,000 square-foot building containing around 30,000 square feet of office space, 9,000 square feet of retail and 37 parking spaces.

A separate community process about the development proposal has been going on in Brookline for several months. To read more on that, [click here](#) and [here](#).

E-mail Matt Rocheleau at mjrochele@gmail.com.

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