



DANIEL

Mountain Brook's Lane Parke Development to get Redesign

Daniel Corp Joins Development Team

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by William Thornton

MOUNTAIN BROOK, Alabama -- Mountain Brook Village's proposed Lane Parke mixed-use development is getting another redesign and a new planning partner. Organizers hope to begin construction on the project -- now three years in the making -- sometime next spring, but they will have to once again navigate the city's zoning process.

Birmingham-based Daniel Corp., developer of Greystone, Ross Bridge, Grand River and other developments across the metro area, is now the project's developer, working for the property's owner, Evson Inc.

John Evans, principal in Evson, said his family originally approached Daniel Corp. three years ago but decided at that time to develop the project on their own.

"We needed the expertise (Daniel) can bring to the table," Evans said. "They have their eye on markets we didn't. They've proven they know what will work and what won't work."

Charlie Tickle, Daniel's CEO, said the company was honored to take part in a "legacy project for the community."

"Lane Parke represents an incredible responsibility that we take very seriously," Tickle said. "We look forward to helping shape this integral piece of property."

Evans said the new redesign of Lane Parke should be ready later this fall for review. While organizers said the project will be smaller than the \$200 million design which gained city approval last year, they would not say how much smaller.

"The overall scale will likely be reduced," Patrick Henry, chief development officer for Daniel Corp. said. "How much is still being talked about. It will be more than just cosmetic." Jeffrey Brewer is once again the lead architect on the project with Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood.

The reasons for a new plan are time and the economy. Lane Parke has been waiting for the completion of Mountain Brook's three-year Watkins Brook Flood Mitigation project. A FEMA-funded project, Watkins Brook added culverts and replaced bridges to prevent flooding in the area around the shopping center. However, the project wrapped a few months later than expected.

In that time, Evans said, the still-stagnant national economy forced the project's planners to rethink its scale.

“We wouldn’t be where we are if we didn’t think we could get this project financed,” Evans said. “And we’re going to spend the time to get it right.”

Evson first proposed Lane Parke in 2009 as a replacement for the 63,000-square-foot Mountain Brook Shopping Center, which opened in 1955, and the 276-unit Park Lane Apartments, which date from 1948.

The first version of Lane Parke was pulled in late 2009 while city officials were considering a rezoning request on it. Residents and some retailers said the proposed 27 acre development was too big in scope and would threaten the existing shops of the village.

Last year, a smaller development plan covering 14 acres, with 206,000 square feet of retail space, 20 townhomes and enclosed parking decks won approval from the City Council by a 4-1 vote. The approval process was sometimes contentious, with hundreds turning out for public hearings on the issue, signing petitions, and the rezoning becoming an issue in three City Council races.

Stephen Bradley, a spokesman for Evson, said the new plan won’t be radically different and will retain some of the hallmarks of its earlier versions, with an emphasis on green space and a pedestrian-friendly design.

“We feel like regardless of how some people felt about the previous design, they will look on this as a better plan,” Bradley said.

Robert Jolly, president of Retail Specialists, said Lane Parke’s leasing strategy will remain the same as before -- appealing to unique retailers and restaurants.

“Interest is still there,” he said. “Retailers are looking for ways to grow in this economy where there are not a lot of opportunities for expansion. So in some ways, there’s a more compatible market now than when we first started.”