

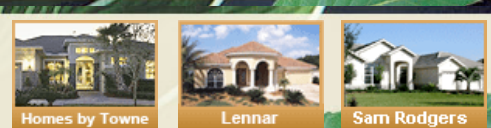
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Condos that don't cost a fortune

A developer pitches mid-price condo complex at Fruitville and Beneva in Sarasota

By KEVIN MCQUAID
kevin.mcquaid@heraldtribune.com

SARASOTA -- An Orlando-based developer has proposed a 104-unit complex at Fruitville and Beneva roads, a project that could provide much-desired, more affordable housing in Sarasota.

Unlike the multimillion-dollar prices being asked for many downtown condos, units in LeCesse Development Corp.'s planned Villa Grande of Sarasota project will range from the mid-\$200,000s to the high \$300,000s.

"There's really no new residential product in the city at that price point," said Bruce Franklin, president of the ADP Group Inc., the local architectural and land planning firm designing Villa Grande.

The planned condos will be housed in three, four- and five-story buildings, over parking. A fourth, single-story building will serve as Villa Grande's clubhouse.

LeCesse hopes to get City Commission approvals and begin work on



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STAFF PHOTO / ROD MILLINGTON / Mark Collier, left, of LeCesse Development Corp., looks at renderings with Bruce Franklin of ADP Group Inc., which is designing and planning Villa Grande.

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the \$33 million project in the spring of 2006.

Mark Collier, LeCesse's local project manager, said the firm hopes to complete Villa Grande in mid-2007.

LeCesse, which owner Salvador Leccese spun off from a family-owned, Rochester-based construction concern in 1985, conceived Villa Grande late last year.

It would be LeCesse's first project in Sarasota. Elsewhere in Florida, the firm developed the 364-unit Grand Reserve at Maitland Park, in Orlando; the 280-unit Grandeville at River Place, in Oviedo; and the 338-unit Grand Reserve at Lee Vista, in Orlando, among others.

Outside Florida, LeCesse has developed multifamily projects in New York and Minnesota.

LeCesse's work on Villa Grande began after another developer had received approvals for 108 low-income rental apartments on the 5.3-acre property. That developer sold the land and abandoned the project after failing to obtain U.S. Housing and Urban Development funding.

LeCesse acquired the vacant 3688 Fruitville Road land in January for \$2.7 million, county records show.

In an effort to alleviate neighbors' concerns about the project's height and traffic it will generate, LeCesse and ADP agreed to build a six-foot masonry wall around the site. Custom landscaping will surround the wall, and a wrought-iron fence will be installed along Fruitville.

After a series of neighborhood meetings, they also removed parking spaces from Villa Grande's perimeter to prevent the problem of headlights shining into neighboring homes, and pledged to fashion a park on an adjacent parcel as a "visual buffer."

But several obstacles to the project remain.

Tim Litchet, the city's Building, Zoning & Code Enforcement director, said early this month that he has "significant issues" with the project regarding tree protection.

Litchet also questioned during a Sarasota Development Review Committee meeting whether Villa Grande has enough parking to meet city requirements.

Franklin said LeCesse intends to save 33 trees on the property, including 13 "grand trees," and plant 208 trees. The firm also hired a professional arborist to recommend ways to save additional trees.

Despite the redesigns, some Eastwood-Bearded Oaks neighborhood residents may still be opposed to Villa Grande's proposed height.

Even so, Collier remains optimistic.

"We like the city. We like the neighborhood. This is a multifamily project, which we do, which already has approvals," he said.

"We're trying to put our flair into designing the site, to create a community that will be comfortable for both the residents already there and those that will be moving in."

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