

North VIEWS

Between
you & me

Kane is man with the plan

To be honest, I always feared North Hills Mall and Plaza would be North Raleigh's version of "Coker Towers."

Remember Coker Towers? It was the proposed inside-the-Beltline project where developer Neal Coker and neighbors could never strike a truce.

A similar situation seemed to be happening at North Hills two years ago, when developer John Kane's initial redevelopment plans brought out vehement neighborhood opposition.

Thad Ogburn

But with North Hills, something interesting happened. Both sides stepped back, regrouped and — this is key — began talking to each other.

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Now, Kane is back with a much-revised plan that offers an innovative mixed-use design and attempts to ease the concerns of neighbors at the same time. Gone are the 13-story towers and the five-story parking deck. In are more landscaping and pedestrian areas.

The developer is doing a great job trying to win public support.

As the plan was unveiled last week, North Hills neighbors received 10-page glossy brochures on their front steps that outlined the project.

Kane anticipated key questions — such as what will happen to an existing wooded buffer — and attempted to answer them.

And an office has been set up in North Hills Mall where interested parties can stop by and review the plan in more depth.

True, there are still a few sticking points. Some don't want any changes in the aforementioned buffer. (Though, as Kane notes in the brochure, it has turned into an "unkempt area of brush, leaves and trees.")

Increased road congestion in the area also is a fear. Kane outlines steps to keep "neighborhood-only" traffic.

Of course, it's too early to say whether this plan will win final approval.

But things look positive given the seeming sense of cooperation and Kane's track record with the transformation of North Hills Plaza into The Lassiter at North Hills.

Our own Coker Towers? Hardly. And thank goodness for that.