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NP International

A rendering of a plaza at the Gables Station mixed-use development on South Dixie Highway in Coral Gables.

The \$172 million Paseo de la Riviera plan, by NPI, would replace the aging Holiday Inn across from the University of Miami with a pair of Mediterranean high-rise buildings, about 10 and 12 stories tall, for apartments and a hotel, and a public plaza with cafes and retail. A broad arch would connect the complex to a park and the neighborhood behind it.

The project would also have easy access to the University Metrorail station across South Dixie, said NPI's Reynolds, thanks to a new pedestrian bridge anchored at a neighboring strip mall.

The city commission's

approval of the project, after some downsizing, prompted a pending lawsuit by residents that has slowed progress on the Paseo. It also created a political backlash. Although a slate of Gables commission candidates backed by a neighborhood association that bitterly opposed Paseo failed to win election in recent balloting, local leaders say they still believe the project is too tall and dense for its location.

That doesn't mean they necessarily oppose other redevelopment proposals along the corridor, one association officer said.

"We're not against development," said Sue Kawalerski, vice president of the Riviera Neighborhood Association. "We like to see pretty things also, and we would like more amenities. All we ask for is, con-

sider the adjacent properties. You have to make the project to scale. It's not just one size fits all.

"If you're on Red Road, that's already a downtown area. Have at it as far as height. That's an appropriate place."

Some critics have also said the new projects will add to congestion along South Dixie. Even if they're connected to transit, they contend, residents will still get in their cars.

But Reynolds said well-balanced, transit-oriented mixed-use development can begin to reverse traffic congestion by "capturing" trips internally — to work, to the wine shop or the dry cleaners — that would otherwise be made by car.

"Outside of downtown Miami, it's a new concept for the area," he said. "But if you get the mix of uses right, you really can reduce

single [auto] ridership. It's amazing."

In any case, said Mitchell Bierman, a Gables attorney who grew up in what's now Palmetto Bay and serves as chair of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce's transportation committee, there may be no other viable choice for South Dixie if Miamians want the long traffic nightmare to end.

"This is the direction we should be going in," Bierman said. "We're waking up to the fact that we are facing traffic Armageddon if we don't start adopting a lifestyle that allows alternatives to getting in a car."

"What you want is a walkable community connected by transit. People want that lifestyle, and the real-estate market is meeting that demand. That's why you're seeing this now."