

## **Prairiefire at Lionsgate rekindles mixed-use project in Overland Park**

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**Prairiefire at Lionsgate**, a mixed-use development in south Overland Park that has remained stuck on the drawing board, appears ready to heat up.

The project is scheduled to come before the Overland Park Planning Commission next month with a revised site plan, and construction could begin in the spring.

Jack Messer, director of planning for Overland Park, said the revised plans for Prairiefire are not substantially different from those the city received in 2006.



Fred Merrill, president of Prairiefire at Lionsgate developer Merrill Cos. LLC.

The 60-acre, \$580 million project at 135th Street and Nall Avenue got derailed by a recession that made prospective tenants wary about signing on with a new project and private financiers nervous about backing a mixed-use development in a down economy.

“We just had to be real quiet for a long time,” said Fred Merrill, president of Prairiefire developer Merrill Cos. LLC.

Merrill envisions 300,000 square feet of new office space, 350,000 square feet of retail, 600,000 square feet of residential units, 100,000 square feet for a hotel and a 35,000-square-foot space to host traveling exhibits from the **American Museum of Natural History**.

The museum is a key component to attract Kansas sales tax revenue (STAR) bonds, which have been approved and are expected to generate \$81 million to help finance the project.

STAR bonds require development components that will attract regional visitors.

The project also includes a 20-screen Cinetopia theater and Pinstripes, an Italian/American bistro concept with lanes for bowling and bocce.

Overland Park also has approved a community improvement district, in which an additional 1.5 percent sales tax should generate about \$30 million to help finance the project.



Overland Park Mayor Carl Gerlach said delays haven't shaken his belief in the project.

"I think it's a very important project for Overland Park and Johnson County, and I think it will draw shoppers from outside the metro area," Gerlach said. "I do have confidence in this developer that has experience in other parts of the country. ... I think it's strictly this economy that has held this thing back."

Merrill said he expects to start construction in the spring after Overland Park planners give the plans their blessing.

He said the main changes in Prairiefire's latest iteration are that residential units, originally slated to be on top of retail shops in the center of the development, are moved to their own structures on the southwest and southeast corners of the project, and the proposed office space is moved closer to the middle.