



Posted on Tue, Aug. 18, 2009

Overland Park approves huge development project tied to the American Museum of Natural History

By BRAD COOPER
The Kansas City Star

A half-billion-dollar development project with a museum that would showcase exhibits from the American Museum of Natural History was approved in Overland Park late Monday.

The City Council voted to approve the nearly 60-acre development at the southwest corner of 135th Street and Nall Avenue that will require about \$100 million in state and local tax incentives to offset some development costs.

The council's action tonight sends the project to the state for approval for up to \$97 million in bonds that would be repaid from sales tax revenues from the project. There is no guarantee that the bonds would be issued or the project would be built.

Called Prairiefire at LionsGate, the 1.4 million-square-foot project will offer upscale shopping, offices, restaurants, entertainment, golf course villas, loft apartments, condominiums and a hotel.

The project will include a Native Wetlands Interpretive Walk, a one-acre park for music and events, a bike/hike trail and a butterfly garden.

The development will include the so-called Prairiefire Cultural Museum, which will house traveling exhibits from the American Museum of Natural History. Potential exhibits include ones about lizards, dinosaurs and horses. A new exhibit would be moved into the museum every six months. The first five years of exhibits have been scheduled.

If the project is actually built, it stands to turn Overland Park's 135th Street into a tourist haven. The project is planned just north of the Nicklaus Golf Club and a couple miles east of a new soccer complex that will open later this month.

The cultural museum alone is expected to draw about 400,000 in its first year. Overall, the project is expected to attract 1.9 million people a year of which about 31 percent are expected to come from more than 100 miles away.

The developers hope to begin construction by the end of 2010 or early 2011.

To reach Brad Cooper call 816-234-7724 or send e-mail to bcooper@kcstar.com

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