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Brickell View developer scraps condo tower for smaller hotel

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A hotel development company that recently purchased a prime block of Brickell real estate scrapped a previous developer's plans for a 29-story 277-unit condo tower and decided instead to build a Hampton Inn & Suites.

Bernard Wolfson's Brickell Hotel Group presented its plans for the hotel Wednesday to the city's Planning Advisory Board, which unanimously supported the proposal.

The original building proposed by BAP Development at 30 SW 12th St. was approved in 2001 as part of a project that included the residential tower VUE at Brickell on the southeast corner of South Miami Avenue and Coral Way.

Wolfson, whose company owns five other Hampton Inns in Broward and

Miami-Dade counties, bought the property for \$6 million

in December 2007, Miami-Dade property records showed.

Wolfson bought the property with no intention of building the 296-foot condo tower approved in the previous plans, attorney Adrienne Pardo told the board.

"Everything we're doing with this particular project we're reducing in scale," Pardo said.

At a height of 155 feet and 15 stories, the 221-room hotel is about half the size of the previously proposed building.

Board member Donna Milo said that with a slumping real estate market, she expects to see other developers downscale buildings in large projects that have already been approved.

"We're going to see a lot more of this," she said.

Other Brickell developers already have chosen to reduce the scope of large residential projects in favor of hotels.

In February, the Miami City Commission approved Off Brickell, a mix of hotel, retail and office space that originally included residential units in the triangular block between Broadway Road and Coral Way.

Pardo said Wednesday the new project would fill a void for reasonably priced hotel rooms in the Brickell area.

"They've looked at the market and feel the need for this hotel, where you have a moderate rate hotel

that makes it more affordable to business travelers who don't want to stay in the JW Marriott," she said.

Room prices should cost about \$200 per night on average and \$100 per night during the summer, Wolfson said.

Wolfson said he expects to break ground during the first three months of 2009 and said construction should take about 18 to 20 months.

The board's support of the project came with 13 conditions, including putting a screen around the building's parking garage.

Pardo said the developer is working to meet the board's conditions.

The Miami City Commission has the final say on the proposed hotel.

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