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## Ashby high-rise developers remain hopeful for a deal with neighbors

■ A compromise is being sought despite possibility of more regulation

By **MIKE SNYDER**  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

The developers of the Ashby high-rise said Thursday that they hope to reach an agreement with neighbors opposed to their development that would avert the need for any new regulatory action by the city.

"We continue to make an

honest effort to cooperate, to negotiate some kind of compromise," said Matthew Morgan, who with his partner, Kevin Kirton, has proposed building a 23-story mixed-use project at 1717 Bissonnet at Ashby.

"That process is ongoing."

Morgan acknowledged that the two sides remain far apart after a series of offers and counteroffers emerged in a Feb. 5 meeting between the developers and neighborhood leaders.

But the fact that the two sides are talking represents progress, he said.

His comments came after Mayor Bill White said he wants city officials to spend up to seven more months developing policies to ensure that high-density projects don't overwhelm surrounding neighborhoods with traffic congestion.

During that time, the mayor said, the city could hold public hearings to develop a new law or clarify a rarely enforced 1939 ordinance authorizing the city engineer to approve or deny a driveway permit for a development.

Morgan and Kirton, who  
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## ASHBY: A negotiated deal would be welcome, group leader says

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applied for a foundation permit last July, have agreed to a series of delays in seeking any additional permits to allow the city time to finish work on its ordinance governing high-density development.

The latest agreement expires Feb. 29. Morgan said, however, that the two men will continue to wait as long as they seem to be making some progress toward a negotiated solution on the project.

Morgan and Kirton said the driveway ordinance is "archaic" and, to their knowledge, the city has never used it to block or substantially alter a development project.

Ever since residents of the

Southampton and Boulevard Oaks neighborhoods began protesting the developers' plans last September, the idea of a private solution to the controversy has been attractive to a number of city officials, developers and neighborhood leaders.

Developers, worried that a high-density development ordinance the city was writing in response to the project might hurt their industry and Houston's economy, tried to arrange deals for someone else to buy the property and develop it in a way more palatable to the neighborhood.

Chris Amandes, co-chair of the Stop Ashby High-Rise task force, said he and his neighbors would welcome a negotiated

settlement as an alternative to city government action.

"We're interested in the result, not the process," Amandes said.

In the Feb. 5 meeting, Morgan and Kirton offered to reduce the size of their building to 19 stories or to build a six-story project while accepting a \$2.65 million payment to recoup their investment.

Neighborhood leaders rejected these ideas but suggested some alternatives.

Morgan and Kirton said no additional meetings have been scheduled, but they are confident that the negotiations will continue.

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