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## Feb. 29: D-Day for Ashby high-rise?

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The developers of the proposed high-rise at Ashby and Bissonnet streets have told the Examiner if a breakthrough in talks on an alternative use for the site hasn't been reached by Friday they will move forward with a 23-story project.

"We are willing within reason to continue to explore the compromise proposals we have put forward," Kevin Kirton of Buckhead Investments said. "The next thing (considered) will probably be the last compromise you'll see."

The developers have another offer in mind, he said, but as of Monday morning had not presented it to the city.

Buckhead declined to discuss specifics until after negotiations are completed.

Kirton and his partner, Matthew Morgan, agreed for a second time not to pursue building permits after the Houston City Council moved Feb. 13 to delay consideration of an ordinance aimed at reducing traffic congestion caused by high-density projects.

That agreement expires Friday when, as Morgan put it, "Our per-

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Matthew Morgan,  
a partner in the development

mit comes off hold, and the city is obligated to continue to review the foundation permit."

He would not predict what the outcome of that review will be, but said "only a handful" of the areas needing approval had not been OK'd prior to the initial 90-day moratorium on seeking permits that was agreed to on Nov. 7.

Mayor Bill White said at a news conference following the council meeting Feb. 13 that he would delay the ordinance, possibly through September, to allow for public hearings.

Morgan said while the developers are pleased the city and stakeholders are taking more time to consider the "widespread implications" of such an ordinance, he termed the mayor's move a "unilateral decision" that will not result in an agreement to delay the project for several months.

Two offers by the developers—one to possibly reduce the structure to 19 stories by offering larger residential units, have been turned down by the Stop Ashby High Rise Task Force, representing the site neighboring Boulevard Oaks and Southampton communities.

A second proposal by Buckhead made at a Feb. 5 meeting that would limit the building to two stories of parking and four stories of dwellings in exchange for \$2.65 million was termed a "compromise accompanied by a payoff" on the stopashbyhighrise.org website six days later.

A statement from task force member Ronald E. Kahanek, who is also the Boulevard Oaks Civic Association president, said raising such a sum of money for "absolutely no economic interest is simply not feasible."

Morgan disagreed with that assessment, saying a scaled-down project would diminish the developers' financial return, while leaving Buckhead with the expense incurred from already installing a larger sewer line that was built with the city's approval.

"What the wider public needs to understand is that we put infrastructure in place to hold 236 units," Morgan said. "It is very, very fair and reasonable financial component," that does not compensate the developers entirely.

He said the "hard and soft" cost of the sewer was about \$450,000. Additionally, fees charged by the city to preserved its capacity were about \$216,000.

Morgan said both of the compromises had been reviewed by the city before being sent to the anti-high-rise group.