

REAL ESTATE

Residents up in arms over project

A group of residents in and around the affluent Southamptton neighborhood is gearing up for another battle against big development.

The latest squabble involves a proposed high-rise at the corner of Bissonnet and Ashby.

The 23-story tower at 1717 Bissonnet has been designed with a five-level parking



**NANCY
SARNOFF**

garage, street-level retail, a level of tenant amenities and office space, five townhomes and 17 floors of apartments or condominiums.

The building was also designed to achieve national certification for its energy-saving and environmental features.

But some residents are calling it "out of character" in an area of mostly two-story single-family homes.

Their gripes about the project include effects they say it will have on traffic, safety, property values and privacy.

Developers Kevin Kirton and Matthew Morgan of Houston-based Buckhead Investment Partners said the project has been designed to be sensitive to the neighborhood, which is where they grew up.

The building's exterior will be red brick with cast stone details, meant to emulate the architecture at Rice University.

"We want to create a building that looks and feels like it's been there a long

time," Morgan said.

The front of the building will be set back from the curb about 55 feet, creating a pedestrian plaza. And the tower portion will be 70 feet from the residential lots behind the building, which they said will ensure privacy for the neighborhood.

The developers did note that a traffic study indicated the level of service during the peak morning hours would decline slightly, but that the city required no mitigation.

The board of the Southamptton Civic Club has voted to oppose the project, according to its executive director Evalyn Krudy. The group hopes to persuade the developers to build something smaller.

But Buckhead contends that a smaller development wouldn't have the same quality of the current plan or offer the same views.

Plus, with what they paid for the property along with what they put in to increase sewer capacity, "density was the only option," Morgan said.

The Maryland Manor Apartments on the site will be torn down for the project.

The Southamptton group, along with the nearby Boulevard Oaks Civic Association, rallied residents and city officials at a meeting last week to discuss the proposed building.

It's not the first time they've come together to take on a developer. A commercial project on Sunset Boulevard involving a medical clinic building has been the subject of neighborhood opposition, as has a condominium project in Rice Village where the builder plans to turn a city street into a pedestrian plaza.