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Board passes buck on Motorola

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Staff Writer

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Boynton Beach * Members of the Planning and Development Board voted not to support a plan to redevelop the Motorola site at Gateway Boulevard and Congress Avenue.

A group of developers bought the property for \$22 million in September. They said they planned to rent part of the property to Motorola, and build offices, apartments and stores on the rest.

But the details of the project need work, board members said Tuesday.

It was unclear whether the city's sewer system could handle the proposed 500 new homes or whether the new residents' cars would cause traffic problems on city and county roads, city planners and the developers agreed.

The developers pledged to solve potential sewer or traffic problems if the city found any in its assessment. But when it came time to vote on whether to recommend that the City Commission approve the project, board members deadlocked.

With a 3-3 vote, the board forwarded the project to the Commission with no recommendation.

Project developer Jeff Douglas said his group would be more prepared by the time it pitched the project to the city commissioners.

"We'll have all our i's dotted and our t's crossed," he said.

The Motorola property is dominated by a single giant building where the company used to make pagers. In 1994 the plant employed 3,500 people.

These days it's down to about 800 employees, a number the company said it plans to cut in half in the coming months. Motorola has shifted production of pagers from the United States to Mexico.

Boynton Beach isn't going to attract another Motorola-sized operation to the site, Douglas said.

"There is no present demand or future demand for industrial use of that property," he said.

So he plans to build a somewhat self-contained community including places to live, places to shop and places to work. The site would be designed so residents could walk from place to place.

The Motorola building and a parcel of land meant for office buildings would hold down the center of the site. It would be surrounded to the north and west by shops and to the south and east by residences.

The new development would cost \$15 million to \$20 million to build, Douglas said.

The Motorola redevelopment proposal landed on the Planning and Development Board's agenda just a week after the City Commission, in a preliminary vote, indicated that it planned to make it easier to build residential projects on industrial land.

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