

*Maury L. Carter & Associates, Inc. represents Encompass Health and provided site selection/acquisition services to procure the property for Encompass Health.*

# Skorman seeks approval for redesigned apartments in Clermont

By LAURA KINSLER

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Three of the apartment buildings would be split level design, with three stories from the parking lot view and four stories from the courtyard view. (Skormin Construction)

Orlando-based Skorman Construction is seeking approval from the Clermont City Council after a creative redesign of its 208-unit apartment complex that respects the geographic challenges presented by the site.

The council introduced an ordinance Tuesday night for the Planned Unit Development zoning, a week after the Planning and Zoning Board unanimously endorsed of the project.

The 17-acre site is at the intersection of Hooks Street and Excalibur Road, adjacent to East Ridge Middle School, and it has elevation changes of at least 30 feet. Land use attorney Jimmy Crawford told the P&Z Board the project went through several iterations to get to this point.

“We designed the site at first, with a two story product, which we really liked,” Crawford said. But it still required significant grading of the site, and city planning staff told the developer they would recommend denial.

“They said we think you can do better, so rather than move forward with the denial and fight and probably lose, we went back and redesigned the site with this different product,” he said.

The conceptual site plan calls for some split-level mid-rise apartment buildings that are three stories on western elevation and four stories on the eastern elevation. The residents enter on the second floor.

Kevin Skorman said those buildings are at the highest point of the property. If they had not used the split level design, the site would have had to be graded to remove almost 30 feet of soil. The city's land development code allows a maximum elevation change of 10 feet for multifamily projects.

Skorman is seeking a waiver to allow up to 13 feet of cut and fill to grade the site.

Crawford told members of the city's Planning and Zoning Commission last week that Skorman opted not to seek density bonuses allowed in the Hooks Street corridor, which would have allowed up to 20 units per acre.

"We looked at doing the additional units, and it didn't work on our site for a couple of different reasons," he said. "Number one: that topography. When we first laid out 20 units to the acre instead of 12, the grading variances and wall variances were much larger, and it just didn't work. We need a fair amount of open green space on here to be able to do the transition for the significant fall across this property, but also the economics didn't justify it."

The density bonus also would have required the developer to set aside 30% of the units as affordable housing and cap the rents for the market rate units. Crawford said it was more economically feasible to build a Class A luxury complex akin to their recently completed Minneola Hills community. The only change is that the Clermont project will have more open space, Skorman said.

"This has the most landscaped area that I've ever been involved in my career, and I started in 1970 so I've been doing this 50 years. And this is the most the most landscape I've ever had. We normally get 20 units to the acre. Getting 12 units to the acre leaves all that open green space so we have room for, you know, playground dog park."

In other business, the City Council approved a PUD rezoning to allow for a new 100-bed rehabilitation hospital by Encompass Health. Council members first introduced the zoning ordinance in late October but several members wanted to delay the final vote until Lake County transportation officials provided an update on the planned Hooks Street extension.

The rehabilitation hospital will be constructed in three phases, with a total approximate square footage of 83,500 square feet, when completed. The first phase will consist of 50-beds, the second phase will be 20-beds, and the third phase will be 30-beds. The developer will be responsible for extending Hooks Street through the southern portion of the property, but not until work begins on the commercial section.



Developer Kevin Skorman said the Clermont project will have more green space than most multifamily communities because they are only seeking a density of 12 units per acre. (Skorman Construction)

Crawford, who also represented Encompass Health, said the traffic impacts from the rehabilitative center are lower than a traditional health clinic because the patients don't come and go, they stay overnight.

Encompass Health is the largest owner and operator of inpatient rehabilitation facilities, with a national footprint that includes 136 hospitals, 245 home health locations, and 83 hospice locations in 39 states and Puerto Rico. Each new 50-bed hospital costs between \$25 million and \$35 million to develop.



Laura Kinsler



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