

Property lines

By Tom Ramstack

Wheaton project designer decided

Developers of a planned \$150 million project next to the Wheaton Metro station have chosen Bonstra Haresign Architects to design the office and retail complex.

Wheaton has been the site of rapid development recently, which has included a \$140 million expansion of the Westfield Wheaton shopping mall on one side of the Metro station and new apartments and town homes on the other side.

Bonstra Haresign Architects has gained a reputation in the Washington area for designing buildings "in difficult locations," said Artie Harris, vice president of Bozzuto Development Co. The office and retail space for the Metro Plaza complex will be built over the transit station.

Bozzuto Development, which focuses primarily on residential units, is teaming with Spaulding & Slye Investments, a commercial developer, on the Metro Plaza project.

It will cover 3 acres, or as much as 450,000 square feet initially. Residences might be added later if market conditions indicate demand is strong enough.

Washington-based Bonstra Haresign Architects' other projects have included the America Online headquarters in Dulles and the Q14 condominiums at 1401 Q St., NW.

The developers say the time is right for more office and retail in downtown Wheaton. Residential expansions have given people who live in the area plenty of places to reside but not enough for shopping and working.

"The vacancy rates in Bethesda and Silver Spring have gotten to historic lows," said Art Frye, senior vice president of Spaulding & Slye Investments, about commercial real estate space in the Maryland suburbs.

Bozzuto Development completed the 243-unit Montgomery at Wheaton Metro apartments in fall 2005 only a short walk from the planned Metro Plaza complex. The new office and retail building is part of a larger plan Bozzuto Development envisioned as far back as 2000, Mr. Harris said.

"We knew that sooner or later it was Wheaton's time to go through additional redevelopment," he said. The Metro Plaza project "allowed us to take advantage of the momentum we have developed by building one site at a time."

Other developers plan to build retail space nearby around the intersection of University Boulevard and Georgia Avenue.

At least part of the momentum for development is tied to the expansion of Westfield Wheaton, which included the addition of retailers Target and Macy's, the developers said.

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