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Big plans set for acreage across from Bay Pines VA hospital

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SEMINOLE — A South Florida developer has bought the former Bay Pines Mobile Home Park and plans a large-scale development on the site.

Kitson & Partners of Palm Beach Gardens paid \$7.65 million for the nearly 60 acres at 10005 Bay Pines Blvd. across from the Bay Pines VA Medical Center. The land was previously bought in May 2006 by John Loder's Bay Pines LP from the E.J. Bickley Trust for \$38.5 million.

Loder planned to build 800 upscale townhomes.

Kitson is more ambitious. It envisions a big mixed-use development that includes a hotel, retail space, apartments, townhomes, perhaps single-family homes and an assisted living facility, said Steve Messing, president of Kitson's commercial division.

"It is rare to find property so well suited for a vibrant mix of services," Messing said.

The site will also have room for a fire station, said Mark Ely, head of Seminole's community development department. The city long ago required the property's owner to set aside enough land so the city could build a station at that end of town.

Andrew Carmody, a Kitson senior vice president, said his company thought Bay Pines would be a good investment for many reasons.

"As the only large-scale redevelopment opportunity in southern Pinellas County, Bay Pines is a very attractive site for new residential development," Carmody said. "You're not going to find another large-scale development property to rival Bay Pines' proximity to existing jobs as well as sought-after amenities like the Pinellas Trail and Madeira Beach."

Also attractive is its location across from the VA hospital, which serves about 100,000 patients who visit the center more than a million times a year, he said.

Ely said the city is looking forward to working with Kitson as it develops Bay Pines. Kitson, he said, is a large, well-respected company.

Kitson was founded in 1992. It prides itself on developing environmentally friendly projects. It has residential and commercial projects across the world.

One of its most ambitious projects is the Babcock Ranch — 18,000 acres in Charlotte and Lee counties that is to be the site of a city powered entirely by the world's largest solar photovoltaic array.

Some of the businesses and almost 20,000 homes will have small solar installations, designed with the latest energy-efficiency measures.

Messing said the Bay Pines property is too small for a large solar photovoltaic array, so it's unlikely that the entire project would be solar powered. It's too early to know if *any* of the businesses or homes will be solar powered, but they will be designed with sustainability in mind, he said.

The end product will be a far cry from the Bay Pines that existed in 2006 when Loder bought the property. At that time, the park had 550 tree-shaded mobile homes where hundreds of mostly elderly residents lived.

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