

Developer threatens to take ‘Miracle Mile’ away from Pulaski

Mar 12, 2017 Reporter Bill Mardis

Lack of money in state coffers and sluggish responses from government officials have caused a developer who proposed a \$100 million Miracle Mile Complex in eastern Pulaski County to issue what might be called an ultimatum that assistance from the state is necessary or he might look elsewhere for opportunities.

Anthony (Tony) Del Spina, president of Lake Cumberland Resort near Burnside, announced last month from his Palm Beach, Fla. residence that his Del Spina Enterprises wants to develop a Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge-type attraction on a 428-acre tract he owns nine tenths of a mile west of Rockcastle River.

Del Spina, in a statement issued Friday, said “ ... to put this situation in perspective “ ... the window of opportunity to provide thousands of new jobs and enormous tax revenue to Kentucky residents is available now, but this offer could be withdrawn at anytime, if other opportunities become available to the developer.”

The city of Somerset, a possible source of infrastructure for water, gas and sewer service for Miracle Mile Complex, is expressing little or no interest in the project.

“Unless some agency, other than the city of Somerset, comes up with a loan or grant for \$20 million (estimated cost of extending infrastructure to the project), we simply are not interested,” said Mayor Eddie Girdler. “If some other agency comes up with 100 percent of the money (for the infrastructure) we would work with (Del Spina) in any way possible.”

“In my opinion, it is not feasible or cost effective ... we cannot pump wastewater that far ... (the project) would have to install some type of pumping station,” Mayor Girdler said. He also mentioned likely environmental problems because of the Wild River status of Rockcastle River.

(Del Spina has not told the Commonwealth Journal he would ask Somerset to provide water, sewer and natural gas to the project. However, he has met more than once with Mayor Girdler).

State Sen. Rick Girdler, asked about the project, responded: “I’ve talked with people in Tourism ... they are aware of it ... the biggest problem is the state just doesn’t have any money.” Girdler mentioned several well-publicized money issues including pension plans and Medicaid with which the state is dealing.

“I’ve known Tony for quite a while ... I wrote insurance for some of his properties at Lake Cumberland Resort (Girdler is a Shelter Insurance agent in

Somerset). He (Tony) is very well liked ... he is a very smart individual. He has talked with me about the project..."

Anthony and Fran Del Spina have recently completed Lake Cumberland Resort, a 10-mile gated lake community in Pulaski County with a taxable value of \$50 million and have generated tax revenues of \$17 million since its inception, Del Spina said.

Danielle Smoot, communications director for Congressman Hal Rogers' Somerset District office, said earlier the congressman's staff has met with Del Spina " ... but he didn't ask for anything."

State Representative Tommy Turner says he is not up to date on what the state is doing about the project.

"I've met with Tony ... he and I sat down and talked about the project. I know he has contacted the state ... but frankly I don't know the status of the project," responded Turner.

The proposed Miracle Mile Complex will be divided into two parcels: Phase One, 300 acres on the north side of Ky. 80, and Phase two, 125 acres on the south side, (intended for future expansion). Each tract contains 2,000 feet of Ky. 80 frontage. Both parcels are centrally located, 19 miles from the heart of Somerset and 13 miles to London's I-75 interchange, Del Spina pointed out.

The front 100 acres will accommodate retail stores and lodging accommodations. The remaining 200 acres will provide residents and tourist entertainment and park attractions such as amphitheater events, nature trails, petting zoo, observation tower with chair lifts, zip lines, horseback riding through the adjacent Daniel Boone National Forest, among numerous additional activities, Del Spina's plan notes. These activities will encompass two thirds of the complex and offer the beginning of a micro-mini Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge type attraction, Del Spina projected.

A mile of roadways will circle though 1 million square feet of commercial-retail buildings, Del Spina said. The remaining 200-acres behind the center will house a multitude of amenities planned to entice the public to visit what is intended to provide an altogether different shopping experience. Educational guided tours of attractions within the Daniel Boone National Forest will be incorporated in the master plan.

An outdoor, 25-acre amphitheater area will offer special entertainment events throughout four seasons, Del Spina said. Heavy emphasis on Somernites Cruise, festivals, arts and craft shows, Christmas Wonderland, New Year's extravaganzas,

Easter hunts, traditional Thanksgiving events and laser light Fourth of July shows will surely attract and overbook onsite hotel/motel and restaurant accommodations,” Del Spina suggested.

Objectives of Miracle Mile Complex are to design and construct the 300-acre parcel into a major regional complex to attract the 4.75 million people who annually visit and play on Lake Cumberland, as well as potential tourists coming into the area, Del Spina said. He projects a three-year development period for Miracle Mile Complex.

In a news release Friday, Del Spina said neither project would affect the National Forest’s beauty or wildlife. The park’s adjoining location offers a 15-mile buffer to permit both London and Somerset to maintain their traditional hometown atmosphere for its residents.

“The public’s support has been outstanding; Contractors in groves are requesting the opportunity to become part of project, TV newscasters (are) requesting interviews, and Facebook followers (are) posting the project news to friends at the speed of a computer virus,” Del Spina wrote in his latest news release.

“The state is eager to generate new jobs and more tax revenue. Miracle Mile can achieve just that, for a fraction of cost it would require to improve the 30-mile Ky. 80 stretch, he continued. Without the state’s cooperation to provide these required services, it is doubtful any developer would consider a project of this nature, in the foreseeable future,” he suggested.

Del Spina puts it short and sweet; “We can have bulldozers on site to start clearing the land in a heartbeat but that will not happen if legislators are not able to formally agree to provide needed services. To date, only Judge-Executive Steve Kelley of Pulaski County appeared on (a) local TV channel endorsing this project. We are hopeful legislators will publically come forward and express their support for this project. To date this has not happened.”

Del Spina said development of I-66 or improving Ky. 80 to interstate standards would be a boost but are not keys to Miracle Mile Complex. If the Transportation Cabinet commits to providing proper access to eliminate traffic congestion, Del Spina said he immediately would put \$5 million in escrow to assure development of the northern side of the project.