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Boylan may be next big thing

Downtown Raleigh - Elevation, proximity

JACK HAGEL, Staff Writer

Andrew Leager strolls around the dusty floor of the squat brick building. He points out details of his future bar, the Sidetrack Brewpub. There will be a round table in a sunlit alcove back there, he says. The kitchen over here.

In the middle of the room is a blond maple table with clean lines and smooth finish. Leager, a commercial woodworker by trade and brewmaster by hobby, made it out of scraps from a recent project. "I have always liked to see how things go together," he says. "I just like to make stuff."

When he opens the bar this summer at Boylan and Hargett streets, he may be helping something even larger come together: Raleigh's next "it" district. The area is bounded by Glenwood Avenue to the east, St. Mary's Street to the west, Hillsborough Street to the north and railroad tracks to the south.

Raleigh's downtown rebirth has been led by two industrial areas turned entertainment strips: Glenwood South and the warehouse district to the east.

A decade from now, if Leager and others like him are successful, those districts will be connected by this six-block area now dotted with a weathered mix of Queen Anne-style homes, small brick office buildings, parking lots and auto-repair shops. It will include a cluster of high-density condominium projects, restaurants and bars, developers predict.

"It's just a matter of time before it gets built up," said developer John Bruckel, whose plan for 94 condominiums at Bloomsbury Estates, across the street from Sidetrack, was approved last week by city planners. "It's going to be one continuous area."

Other developers have bought property, grabbing land before prices shoot to the levels seen in more mature parts of the city. Many placed bets on the Triangle Transit Authority's regional rail system -- which planned a rail stop only a few blocks away -- to help boost the area. Funding problems have iced the rail plan, but not developer expectations.

They say features such as the area's elevation, which offers views of downtown, and its proximity to the center city's main business and entertainment cores, N.C. State University and historic Boylan Heights will lure residents.

"You go out to that part of town and you're like, man, that has the opportunity to be the next big thing," said Patrick Woods, development manager at The Boulevard Co., a Charlotte company planning condominiums at the corner of Hillsborough and Boylan.

Activity since July seems to indicate that. Bruckel's condominiums were approved; Steelhead Development said it



Condominiums and a bar are planned for S. Boylan Ave. between Hillsborough St. and the railroad tracks in Raleigh.

Staff Photo by Takaaki Iwabu

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would convert 711 Hillsborough St. to office condominiums; lawnmower repair shop S.M. Crocker and Son turned into an art gallery; and a former bank at 615 Hillsborough sold for \$2.05 million -- about five times what it sold for in 1994.

Meanwhile, property owners are getting calls from speculating developers. Chiropractor Chad Chisholm, who has run his practice at the corner of Hillsborough Street and Glenwood Avenue for 11 years, is among them. He's not sure whether he'll be there in 2010.

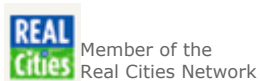
"If the right thing comes along, we'll have to consider it pretty seriously," said Chisholm, who in May paid \$700,000 for the 0.33-of-an-acre lot his office sits on at 605 Hillsborough across from Snoopy's.


"There already is so much more walking traffic down here than there used to be," he said.

Allen Eastridge, owner of Allen's Automotive at the corner of Hillsborough and Boylan, says he doesn't have a lease. Although he trusts his landlord's offer to stay as long as he wants, he says, "it's spooky to think about. The man can kick you out any time."

"He knows what he's got. A gold mine," Eastridge said through a light haze of cigarette smoke. "I wish we owned it. We'd be sitting right."

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