

Date: Dec 9, 2009; Section: Metro & State; Page: 3B

PEMBROKE PINES

City weighs film complex plan

Two film production companies want to rescue part of the land once envisioned for Pembroke Pines' City Center – and turn it into a studio and entertainment complex.

BY DANIEL CHANG

dchang@MiamiHerald.com

Only in the movies does the white knight ride in on horseback and save the day.

Now Pembroke Pines officials are hopeful, though cautious, that a plan dreamed up by a pair of upstart film producers will help rescue the city from the white elephant that is City Center, a once-envisioned downtown hub for the sprawling suburban community.

Pas Media and The Studios of the Americas — two production companies with one TV pilot completed since 2008 — have proposed to buy about 58 acres around Pembroke Pines City Hall and build a studio and entertainment complex.

The companies, both based in South Florida, will need an estimated \$600 million to build their vision, according to a proposal to be reviewed at a workshop Wednesday in the city commission's chambers.

If the proposal succeeds it would help to bail out Pembroke Pines' \$66 million investment in 115 acres at the southwest corner of Pines Boulevard and Palm Avenue.

The vacant former site of City Center — which was to include residential , retail and entertainment — is a reminder of the city's past missteps. This latest proposal, the third alternative plan for that site reviewed by city officials this year, may finally provide a viable backup, said Vice Mayor Angelo Castillo.

"I'm cautiously optimistic at this point," he said.

Bill Metz, a vice president for Pas Media, said the companies want to begin negotiations to buy the land, with an option for the remainder.

The companies have submitted preliminary plans to build a complex that would include two large film studios, a Latin music museum, a 2,000-seat amphitheater, two hotels with 200 total rooms, a conference center, shops and parking garages.

"We've done our research," Metz said. "We believe wholeheartedly this type of project will succeed in Florida."

In order to succeed, though, a major motion picture studio must rely on robust financial partnership from the state and local governments, said Elizabeth Wentworth, who recruits productions for the Broward Alliance, the county's economic development arm.