



OUR VIEW: Ormond Crossings finally could blossom

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This sale gives local officials reason to hope that the jobs, business revenue and population growth Ormond Crossings would generate are finally on their way.

For almost 15 years, Ormond Crossings has been the wish that never really came true. When city and county leaders talked about the project - slated to bring thousands of new homes and as much as 4 million square feet of retail, office and industrial space south of U.S. 1, on both sides of Interstate 95 - they would invoke the magic name of Heathrow, the I-4-straddling community in Seminole County that's full of corporate headquarters and upscale homes. Ormond Beach officials did their best to lay the groundwork for enchantment, annexing the property into the city and approving zoning and utility plans.

Still, the sleeping beauty slumbered on. And in September, Allete Inc., the parent company of Tomoka Holdings, which owns the 6,000 acres at the heart of Ormond Crossings - put the land up for sale. This week, The News-Journal learned that the land changed hands fairly quickly, with a \$21 million sale to a company formed by DeLand-based Ford Properties.

(READ: Local family buys Ormond Crossings site)

It would probably strain the metaphor too much to talk about the boy next door, or love's true kiss. So here's the reality: This sale gives local officials reason to hope that the jobs, business revenue and population growth Ormond Crossings would generate are finally on their way.

The course of Florida land development never did run smoothly, and there are still significant challenges to overcome. One of the biggest is the need for about \$5 million in utilities - water and sewer lines, roads and other improvements - that should be in place before construction starts, says Ormond Beach economic-development director Joe Mannarino. That's just a start. Much more will be needed as the project progresses, and there's an active railroad line to be negotiated as well.

How, and when, those costs are paid will be the subject of negotiation between city and county officials, the Ford family and, potentially, the development firms that will oversee construction of various elements of Ormond Crossings.

It probably makes sense to build the industrial portion of Ormond Crossings first, Mannarino and other officials agree. The site is adjacent to the Ormond Beach airport, and the city's Airport Business Park is close to full, with 37 companies doing business there. It will be easiest to bring utilities to that part of the project - and getting the industrial segment up and running means Ormond Crossings could be generating jobs almost right away.

Then there's the retail - potentially, more square footage than the Volusia Mall - and the 2,950 houses that are also part of the plan approved about six years ago by city officials.

But local officials' confidence is buoyed by the reputation of the Ford family, and the fact that many of the permitting hurdles have already been cleared. The bustling development south of this parcel - including the Tanger Outlets mall and Trader Joe's distribution center on Interstate 95 - add to the excitement. "The timing could be perfect," says former Ormond Beach Mayor Ed Kelley, who takes office as Volusia County chair in early January.

After waiting so long, officials aren't quite as effervescent when speaking of Ormond Crossings' potential. But their quiet optimism is justified: It seems likely that this story will, at long last, have a happy (and prosperous) ending.