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Work gets started on SoDo project

The development south of downtown Orlando will include retail, offices and residential units.

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Bulldozers start clearing old buildings today from a 20-acre site in south Orlando for the \$100 million SoDo development.

SoDo -- short for "south of downtown," a takeoff on New York's SoHo district, a part of Manhattan south of Houston Street -- is between Grant and West Crystal Lake streets on South Orange Avenue.

Plans call for converting the rundown block into an urban center with 330,000 square feet of retail, including a SuperTarget; 70,000 square feet of restaurants and boutiques; 60,000 square feet of second-floor offices; and 300 residential units.

The project is a joint venture of North American Properties Inc. of Cincinnati and Kimco Development, a subsidiary of Kimco Realty Corp. of New Hyde Park, N.Y.

Wood Partners of Atlanta has signed on to develop the project's residential portion. Locally, Wood Partners has already developed the 30-story Solaire at the Plaza condo tower in Orlando and is developing the 200-unit Intermezzo at The Rialto condos on Sand Lake Road in south Orange County.

Tonya Creekmore, North American Properties' vice president of leasing, said SoDo "will create a true model for future growth in the area south of downtown." The project is north of Michigan Street and south of Orlando Regional Medical Center.

The property to be developed is now occupied by three closed restaurants, a retail center and several industrial and small office buildings. Cupkovic Architecture LLC of Cleveland is the overall project architect; the Preston Partnership LLC of Atlanta is architect for the residential portion.

Creekmore said North American Properties plans to introduce its "Build a Bridge" program, designed to help schools in areas where the company develops real estate. Spokeswoman Jenn Weyand said the help could range from cash donations to lining up tutors for students. A school has not yet been picked, she said.

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