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Pooler's Newest Development

Morgan Tract Sets Stage for New Growth

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A 1,400-acre Pine Barren Road tract bought nearly 60 years ago for its timber value will soon be home to a town center and other commercial development that could shift Pooler's center of gravity.

The commercial- and mixed-use-zoned land fronts Pine Barren Road to the south; Pooler Parkway runs through it to the east; and the Georgia Central Railroad cuts through a northern portion set aside for light industrial development.

That transportation access and the property's proximity to interstates 95 and 16 make it a strong candidate to become a bustling commercial district, said Savannah CPA Philip Morgan, a member of one of three families that share ownership of the property.

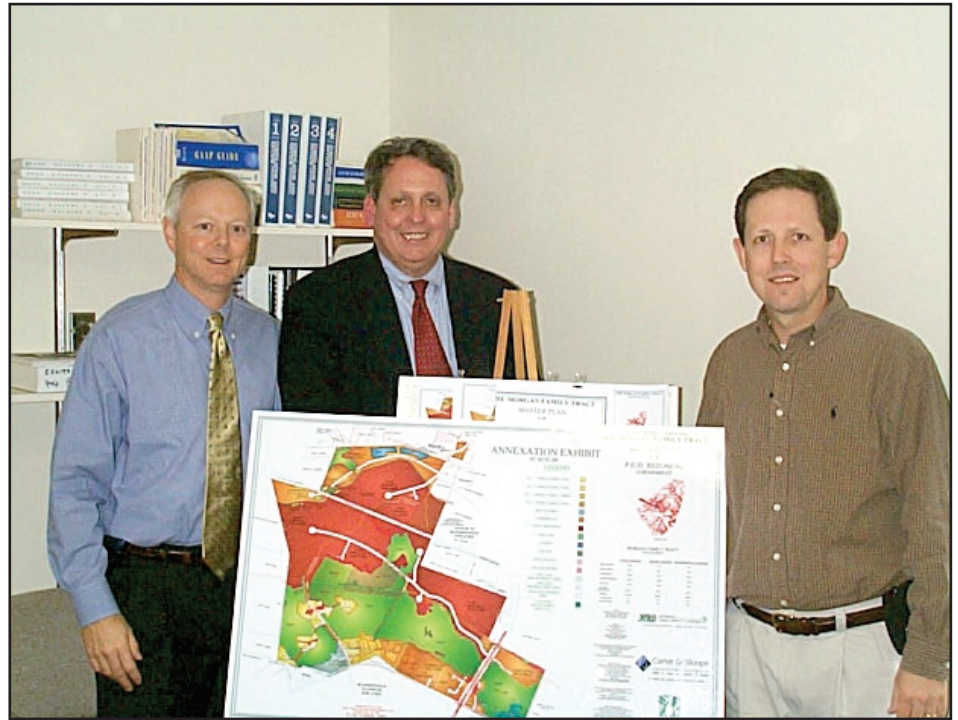
Metro Developers Inc. is banking on the tract becoming a draw for retailers and other businesses looking for a home. The real estate development company bought up 46 acres and plans to develop its Pooler Town Center project on them, complete with a supermarket, bank, shops, offices and multi-family residences on a tree-lined Main Street broken up by a trio of public squares, said Metro's Andrew Feiler.

He said he envisions a combination of junior-box retail and smaller retail that is "local, regional and national."

Philip Morgan and commercial real estate brokers Harvey Gilbert of Gilbert Realty Co. and Cliff Dales of Neely/Dales LLC started work on the 1,400-acre project three years ago. Today, much of the infrastructure for the mixed-use commercial parts of the development are in place, including water and sewer.

"We have everything in place," Dales said.

Further, development permits that include a federal Section 404 Wetlands



The Morgan Tract Team: Cliff Dales, left, Harvey Gilbert and Philip Morgan.

Permit are in hand, Morgan said. The master plan designates a large portion of the southern end of the tract, including two prime corners, for mixed-use commercial. The northern portion is designated for light industrial and will make up the last parcels marketed and developed.

Morgan's father and two uncles bought 4,000 acres of woodlands in 1946 and turned its timber-harvesting rights over to Union Camp, an arrangement that lasted until the mid '80s. The \$27 an acre the late Philip Morgan Sr. and his brothers Sam and Edward Morgan paid for the property is bringing a very healthy return, Philip Morgan said, noting they have already closed on \$4.5 million in sales of parcels designated for commercial development. "We've got other offers we haven't addressed yet," he said.

Dales noted the 17 acres of multi-family

zoned property is also drawing strong interest. "We've got several offers," he said.

Among the early buyers is Sheffield and Shore LLC, whose principals Jim Sheffield and Carey Shore have acquired 9.3 acres. They plan to build neighborhood retail that would include restaurants, a bank and a pharmacy. "We're going to start clearing the land this week," Sheffield said last week.

"It will include certainly be retail and possibly some office and also some institutional. We've designated space for church buildings,"

He said he envisions many of the buildings being three floors with retail on the first one, offices above and multi-family residential on the top floor.

The project will carry the name "Morgan's Corner," but the developers

named it after Carey Shore's daughter, not the family that sold them the land.

Rooftops going up

Konter Homes is helping to guarantee the commercial enterprises that will go up a steady stream of customers. The company headed by Jerry Konter started work in March on building 222 homes on 60 acres within the Morgan tract. Konter said in a recent interview that some commercial development will be included on the 60 acres.

Dubbed The Morgan Pines development, it will have 96 town-home units, 66 homes ranging from \$140,000-\$160,000, 36 homes from \$180,000-\$250,000 and 23 custom homes for \$300,000 or more. Konter said he is using the traditional Savannah square look in the development.

Harvey Gilbert, who recently updated a study of the I-95 corridor and its development potential he performed a couple years ago, said he expects steady residential growth along the corridor for years to come. "We're getting a tremendous number of retirees and pre-retirees," he said. "No

one saw that 10 years ago."

With the rooftops and the prospects for thousands more, Pooler is showing up on the radar screens of a lot of retail companies across the country, said Andrew Feiler, the Pooler Town Center developer. "Pooler is on the lips of retailers," he said. "A lot of national tenants are very conscious of what is going on in Pooler. A lot of them either have Pooler in their plans or at least on their minds."

The Pooler Parkway is the spine on which Pooler's growth is built, Feiler noted. He said that with the exception of Godley Station residents who already have easy access to retail and other commercial offerings, people in the Pooler area "are going to scoot right down Benton Boulevard to shop in the Pooler Town Center."

There'll be a loop to make the travel convenient, he said, noting Pooler Parkway to Quacco Road will make up the inner loop to the east, and Jimmy DeLoach Parkway to Little Neck Road will make up the outer loop to the west.

At some point, Feiler added, Pine Barren

Road will be widened, thus further improving access to the new homes and businesses on the Morgan tract.

A look ahead

As envisioned in the master plan, the Morgan tract will have 105.24 acres of single-family development, 16.28 acres of multi-family, 203.38 acres of commercial, 533 of light industrial, 445 acres of preserved wetlands and 6.92 acres of preserved uplands.

The wetlands extend the width of the tract and will buffer the commercial and residential development from the light industrial development.

Development plans call for building a "spine" road that would serve the interior of the light industrial area.

Gilbert said warehouse distribution centers will most likely be among the facilities that go up in the light industrial area. "As land gets used up around the port, the light industrial is in a tremendous spot to serve the port. And," he added, "we have rail." ■