

# Boardwalk near Lake Katherine proposed



An artist rendering of the development planned for northeast corner of Route 83 and Harlem Avenue. (83 Harlem LLC / April 20, 2014)

**By Janice Neumann, Special to the Tribune**

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A new plan for Palos Heights' gateway features a boardwalk, restaurants, retailers, condos and a boutique hotel — all within eyesight of Lake Katherine Nature Center and Botanic Gardens and a waterfall.

Preliminary plans for the development on the northeast corner of Route 83 and Harlem Avenue gained unanimous approval last week from the Planned Unit Development Commission. They call for six to eight restaurants (46,000 square feet), several retail spots,

a boutique hotel (38,400 square feet) and a four-story condominium building with 32 units (also 38,400 square feet). There would be about 400 parking spaces, some of them underground.

The adjacent boardwalk would be 35 to 40 feet wide and made of concrete topped with a cement board stained to resemble a real boardwalk. A stoplight would be added at Route 83 east of Harlem Avenue .

"We needed a feature ... something where folks could come as a destination," said Charles Allenson, a consultant representing the developer, Harlem 83 LLC in Chicago, which has a contract to buy the property. "All we had to do is look out the back door and we saw Lake Katherine."

Allenson said the development, which is being called "The Boardwalk," would take advantage of the lake's beauty and could attract customers from throughout the region.

John Livaditis, managing partner of the development and an investor in several restaurant groups, said eateries could include barbecue and Mexican, Roots Pizza, and an organic bakery/diner.

"We're really trying to hit that middle tier," said Livaditis. "Part of what we also envision is creating a community center where we can host (culinary) events."

He said retailers might include beauty salons, shoe stores or art galleries. The boardwalk and other outdoor features could attract dog walkers, who might stop for lunch, he said.

"It's a breathtaking view," Livaditis said. "You're not going to get that at the Orland mall."

While nearby green space owned by Lake Katherine is a selling point, any clean-up or changes in that property would need to be discussed with Lake Katherine representatives.

"I can guarantee everyone Lake Katherine will remain the same," said Jean Gnap, a board member and former alderman. "We're not landscaping Lake Katherine for this development, but if they have some ideas to help out, that's fine," she said of keeping the preserve property "natural."

The hotel would be a "great partner for Lake Katherine," which often holds educational events, she said.. Several members of the commission said the hotel also would offer a place for visitors to Trinity Christian College, Palos Community Hospital and elsewhere.

The property has been vacant since a car dealership moved out more than a decade ago. Previous developers who have presented plans ended up backing out after public opposition and difficulties finding tenants because of the weak economy.

About 40 residents attended the commission meeting and most seemed enthusiastic about the proposal.

"We're really excited about some of the concepts that are presented here," said resident Bob Grossart, who chairs the Economic Development Advisory Committee. "The property has been vacant for 15 years and I think it's time now we should do something about it."

Several residents who live near the site said they were concerned about noise, safety and flooding.

"This is a good community, but if this goes through, we are not going to have our quiet community," said William Moran. "As a citizen, I don't want it."

Frank Radochonski, longtime owner of Pop's eatery, said he "loved the look," but was worried about the competition.

"I think you ought to consider what it's going to do to other restaurants in the city," he said..

The next step is for the developer to work out details, including engineering, signs, landscaping and access. Allenson said those plans could be presented to the city council in June. If approved, construction could begin later this year and be completed in 2015.

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