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Farm at Ky. 22, Waterson is sold

Hildebrand tract may be slated for mixed uses

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The 38-acre Hildebrand farm off Brownsboro Road at the Watterson Expressway survived virtually unchanged through decades of development around it.

But no longer.

Blue-Fenley-Blue Properties LLC bought the land May 27 for \$4.96million from Margaret Hildebrand of St. Matthews, who's in her late 80s, and her brother, Henry, who's in his 90s and living in a Lyndon nursing home.

The contents of the old farmhouse and outbuildings were auctioned last fall when Margaret Hildebrand moved to a condominium after living on the farm since age 6.

The buying partnership consists of David Fenley of Fenley Real Estate and developers Jonathan and Todd Blue of **Cobalt Ventures** LLC. Steve Fenley, David Fenley's brother, is consulting.

The developers have held several meetings with officials and residents of the adjacent cities of Crossgate and Graymoor-Devondale, and they're talking about building a mixed-use development. It could include single-family and patio homes, condominiums, office and retail buildings, a small hotel and an assisted-living facility.

"It's by far the best piece of property in Louisville metro," said David Fenley, managing director of the partnership. "You could put anything over there and it would work. It's just location, location, location. It's just absolutely superior."

Residents of Crossgate have been used to looking at a cornfield. Crossgate Mayor Peggy Swain, who worked for 34 years as a staff member for the Louisville-Jefferson County Planning Commission, said she's not against development.

"I'm for good planning," she said. "Everybody has a right to do something with their land as long as it doesn't harm or (cause) any inconvenience to others."

Swain's main concern is to prevent more traffic in Crossgate, a residential enclave along what has become a busy commercial thoroughfare. "It's supposed to be a sleepy little subdivision, but it's not," she said.

Graymoor-Devondale Mayor John Vaughan also wants to protect his city from a flood of new traffic. "We have tried to keep a fairly open mind," he said. "They have presented some rather unique plans that are more in line with Cornerstone 2020," Louisville's land-use plan.

Kevin Ford, the Hildebrands' attorney, said about 25 bidders submitted written offers, which were narrowed to 12 "serious" bids. He said the site is appealing for development. "They're not going to make any more like this off Brownsboro Road," Ford said.

David Fenley said last fall that he had approached Margaret Hildebrand about buying the property and came to an agreement with her in February. She said the family had many offers over the years but never wanted to sell.

"I knew Fenley was interested in it, and I thought that he was compatible with the neighborhood," Hildebrand said. The Fenleys had built the Brownton Place office building off Brownsboro Road next to the farm, and "they were good neighbors," she said.

Hildebrand said she misses her garden since moving to a condominium, but she's making friends and growing lettuce in a couple of pots on her balcony. She and her brother had another sister and brother who lived on the farm, but both have died.

Hildebrand did not know the developers' plans for the land, and she did not intend to try to influence them. "When anyone buys property and pays a big price for it, they should have the right to do what they want," she said.

The cost to develop the land, including the purchase price, could be \$50 million to \$100 million, David Fenley said.

He and others say access is a big issue. One idea that's being discussed is a "roundabout" from an entrance off Ky.22.

Pat Kennedy, a commissioner in Crossgate, is apprehensive about adding multiple uses to an area that already has heavy traffic flow. "If all that happens, we're going to end up with a lot of traffic on 22," he said. "It's hard to get out of Crossgate, especially at the busy times."

Right now, the only access to the farm property is from a secluded driveway that branches off a short, original segment of Ky. 22 that ends at the Watterson Expressway, alongside a Dairy Queen and other buildings.

Theresa Stanley of Crossgate, chairman of the Brownsboro Road Area Defense coalition, said her group surveyed Crossgate residents about what they would like to see on the farm property. "Overwhelmingly, they said they would not like to see commercial," she said.

She, too, is concerned about increased traffic and said people will miss the open space. "We always knew it would change some time, but a drastic change is hard to take," she said.

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