

Lincoln Beach developers expect lease in January

By Jaime Guillet Staff Writer



The lone remnants of what was once the Lincoln Beach amusement park are palisades that have been covered with graffiti. (CityBusiness file photo)

NEW ORLEANS - The \$435-million Lincoln Beach redevelopment project in eastern New Orleans is taking longer than expected, but the lead private developer says he anticipates a lease with the city of New Orleans "any moment now."

"The project is moving forward," said Rickey Spearman, president of primary developer Nolatown Inc. "We have worked diligently with the city to identify and address any issues, existing or potential, which could arise with a project of this magnitude. The mayor and his designee, Sean Cummings, Councilwoman Williard-Lewis, Sen. Ann Duplessis and All Congregations Together director Mary Fontenot were very instrumental in pointing out public-interest concerns which would had to have been addressed prior to commencement of the project.

"At this point, we eagerly anticipate executing a lease with the city," Spearman said. "We look forward to providing the employment opportunities for several hundred New Orleanians during the construction stage, and many more afterwards."

Cummings, CEO of the city agency that coordinates development of city-owned property, the New Orleans Building Corp., said the city is currently "drafting a lease, pursuant to the terms of the letter of intent," with Nolatown Inc., even though the city's letter of intent with Nolatown actually expired Aug. 24.

In January, the city issued an letter of intent with Nolatown and gave the developers 180 days to present a comprehensive description of the development and financing details. It is unclear whether Nolatown provided that description.

District E Councilwoman Cynthia Willard-Lewis says she will be asking for a "complete update" on the development's status from Cummings at the next NOBC meeting, because she is "very anxious to get the project moving."

"The slow movement has been in deference to Nolatown and its ability to get funding," said Willard-Lewis. "We have been painfully patient, but I am running out of patience. Either come up with the money or the city should get its own financing. I hope (Nolatown) is successful. (Lincoln Beach) is a state cultural project, it's an environmental treasure — it's the only white sandy beach in the area — it's a tourism spot, it's an important spot in the community."

Spearman says all "financing is there and the funding is in place." He says his national group of private developers that make up Nolatown, which includes Glenn Broom, Kemic A. Smothers, Norberto Nardi and Eugene Radcliff, are waiting patiently on the city to formulate a lease.

Lincoln Beach originally was built as an amusement park for blacks during segregation. Nolatown developers want to transform the 15-acre Lincoln Beach site along Lake Pontchartrain and a 10-acre site south of the beach across Hayne Boulevard into a recreational water park.

Nolatown's vision is to create green space; an entertainment complex; gathering areas with cultural themes; recreational, commercial and hospitality areas; housing and residential facilities and support areas; and a commuter train stop. Housing would include 400 condos and a 500-vehicle parking garage.

The next NOBC meeting will be in the first two weeks of the new year, Cummings said. •