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## **No shortage of ideas for developing Thermal site**

How about an indoor water park for downtown Nashville? What about a mini-Branson, Mo., with music theaters downtown? Maybe Nashville should establish a World Trade Center? Or perhaps another waterfront park?

These are among the lesser-known ideas for the 11-acre Thermal plant site that a Metro Council task force has heard while considering what would be the best use for the riverfront property.

Tomorrow, the task force has a marathon day scheduled at which it will hear from developers pitching other higher-profile presentations it received as a result of a formal request put out by Metro.

The 19 members will hear more details from Charlotte-based Pappas Properties on its idea for a retail and residential development on the site.

Peabody Hotel Group will talk more about its \$135 million proposal for a 500-room hotel and may well have to answer questions on why it would need up to \$40 million in some form of tax breaks or other economic inducements to build it.

The Nashville Sounds will make a pitch yet again for a \$38.5 million baseball stadium and adjacent mixed-use development. The Greater Nashville Hotel & Lodging Association will make its pitch for a convention center on the site while that group's president, Hugh Harper, listens as a member of the task force.

Cookeville architectural and engineering firm Maffett-Stamps will explain its idea for a \$160 million marina with a futuristic high-rise of offices, condominiums and a hotel. Like the Peabody proposal, the Maffett project would include a new Sounds baseball stadium.

Metro's public-access station will tape the meeting and may run it on Channel 3 later. Once the members see the presentations, they will do their evaluations and make a recommendation by the end of July.

But in evaluating all the plans, the task force could come up with an entirely different idea.

Jack Wood, chairman of the task force, said he thought it was interesting how the Metropolitan Development Housing Agency is serving as its own developer for Rolling Mill Hill. In the previous meeting, members saw how MDHA was prepping residential sites to pitch to potential builders.

That's an option for Thermal as well.

"We could give them a procedure to make any of it happen," Wood said.

Task force member Ray Dayal, who also owns three limited-service hotels in and around downtown, has been touting the idea of an indoor water park akin to ones in Wisconsin Dells, Wis., about an hour's drive northwest of Madison, where there are now 18 indoor water parks since the first one opened a decade ago.

The granddad of them is at the Kalahari Resort & Convention Center there. It has a 125,000-square-foot water park and an equal amount of convention space.

In 2003, 2.9 million visitors spent \$847 million, a 12.6% increase over the previous year, said Steve Shattuck, Wisconsin Dells Visitor and Convention Bureau's spokesman.

Remember the number of visitors Opryland theme park brought?

Nashville songwriter Dan Tyler, who has several No. 1 country songs to his credit, called Wood with the idea of putting theaters on the riverfront like those in Branson.

Local pitchman Milt Capps thought it would be a good idea for a World Trade Center to assist Nashville business in conducting international trade.

With a letter to Wood, at-large Councilman Buck Dozier officially weighed in with his idea to master-plan the entire area, linking Thermal with Rolling Mill Hill and the rest of SoBro.

In the late 1990s, planners, architects and others gathered for a groupthink of what could and should be done in SoBro.

Now, Michael Hayes, president of C.B. Ragland, a significant property owner near the Thermal site, told the task force that he is working with neighboring property owners to create a master plan for development.

Since March, the Nashville Symphony has been working through the Nashville Downtown Partnership to create some sort of a master plan with neighbors of the symphony hall to guide development in the area.

With the way things are going south of Broadway, that area could well become one of the most master-planned areas ever in the city. That must mean development is on the verge of exploding.

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