

Buffer solves Prado spat

New plan for trees, wall satisfies residents of neighboring community

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In the end, a dispute over the new Prado in Sandy Springs was resolved with renewed promises to plant trees and build a security wall.

And one neighborhood leader said his role in the controversy taught him a lesson he wants to share with other city residents who live near places developers are sniffing around.

"Be vigilant, or you may not get what you thought you had bargained for," said Chip Howard, a member of the Carriage Gate Homeowners Community.

The flap at the Prado involved expectations of some Carriage Gate residents that their townhomes would be completely shielded from the new Prado. The 35-year-old Prado was demolished, and the new version is to start opening this autumn with shops and restaurants designed for a new generation.

Townhome owners thought they had a deal with the developer, Sembler Co., for Sembler to install trees and a chest-high retaining wall between their properties. Concerns grew as the Prado was built.

"As the construction progressed, it became clear Sembler wouldn't do what they'd said," Howard said.

Sembler spokesman Nick Gold said that just wasn't the case.

"There was never any thought of not doing what we said we would do," Gold said. "New contractors did come on the site, and it was a matter of getting them up to speed. We feel we've had good discussion with the community throughout the entire process."

The two sides met again this month. This time they came to an agreement that Sembler would install the security wall and plant trees on the hill above it, which touches the edge of Carriage Gate's property.

But there is no getting around the reality that some owners will have a good view of the new Prado from their decks and rear windows.

"We never implied that they wouldn't see the development from their homes," Gold said. "In the final negotiations, we did agree to taller trees than originally planned, and they will be mixed in with the other trees in a natural way to buffer the two properties."

Howard said he's satisfied with the outcome.

"I'm not trying to praise Sembler, but they have finally come around to doing what they said they were going to do."