

Is Sembler in line to buy GM's Doraville site?

Struggling automaker looking for developer to create mixed-use project

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General Motors is talking to just one company about buying the closed Doraville plant site, but won't say who it is.

New Broad Street Cos. of Orlando and Hines of Houston both said they are not in discussions with GM.

That leaves only the Sembler Co. of St. Petersburg, Fla., known for its big-box shopping centers and mixed-use projects such as the Target-anchored Edgewood Retail District near Little Five Points.

"Sembler's not commenting on that right now," said company spokesman Nick Gold about the Doraville project.

The plan is to turn the 165-acre industrial site into a mixed-use destination. It would be largest so-called brownfield development in metro Atlanta. Atlantic Station, a former steel mill site in Midtown, is 138 acres.

GM said earlier it hoped to pick a developer by year's end.

"We are continuing to negotiate with a prospective buyer. We are not confirming who that organization is," GM spokesman Daniel Flores said Monday. "We remain hopeful that we can reach an agreement with the prospective buyer, but I'm not going to speculate on the timing of such agreement. There's really nothing more I can comment on at this time."

Current market conditions are poor for any new project, let alone one as complex as the Doraville plant.

Residential real estate has been in freefall for more than a year, and the performance of commercial real estate is expected to slip next year. Development companies are putting projects on hold.

Meanwhile, GM is saying if it doesn't receive billions of dollars in federal aid, it might file for bankruptcy. Car sales have plunged right along with [home sales](#).

The world's largest automaker for decades, GM said it will temporarily close 20 factories to cut 250,000 vehicles from its production schedule for the first quarter of the new year.

Four companies made presentations to GM in September about redeveloping the Doraville site. Car production shut down there the same month.

A few weeks later Jacoby Development said it was dropping out. The creator of Atlantic Station, Jacoby had recently bought a second brownfield project, the former Ford Motor plant in Hapeville.

That left Sembler, Hines and New Broad Street.

“We are not in active negotiations with them [GM] at the moment,” said Barbara Koenig, a spokeswoman for New Broad Street. “But we don’t consider this one a done deal, wherever it lands, until it closes and that could be some time.”

Hines’ Kurt Hartman said, “After our presentation we really haven’t heard anything” from GM.

Sembler is developing Town Brookhaven near Oglethorpe University, which is scheduled to open next summer and have 600,000 square feet of retail and 1,500 homes.

The company triggered a neighborhood uproar last year in DeKalb County when it tried to supersize another project, Town Briarcliff, a planned mixed-use project off Briarcliff Road. Sembler wanted to buy adjacent property owned by the DeKalb school system but the school board rejected the proposal.

Neighbors feared such a large project would create unmanageable traffic congestion.