

NEWS

UPSCALE HOTEL

Hotel in Castleberry Hill would serve Falcons stadium

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An upscale hotel project is in the works for the Castleberry Hill community that would serve the new \$1.2 billion retractable-roof Atlanta Falcons stadium now under construction.

A team that includes Atlanta-based Gallman Development Group LLC is planning a roughly 200-room hotel with about 130 apartments, retail space and a small park on a site bounded by Centennial Olympic Park Drive and Mitchell, Chapel and Magnum streets.

Called Castleberry Park, the project would be within walking distance of the new football stadium.

The hope is to lure a major high-end hotel brand such as Hilton.

Castleberry Hill residents applaud the plan as they see the hotel attracting more pedestrians into the neighborhood that's filled with art galleries and converted lofts, considered by many a haven for the creative class. Earlier this year, USA Today named Castleberry Hill one of the 10 best city art districts in the country.

"We are hoping people filter in and check out places in the neighborhood," said Calvin Lockwood, who heads land use and zoning for the Castleberry Hill Neighborhood Association, which

voted unanimously Sept. 15 to recommend approval of the hotel project (which actually was first envisioned in 2007 as an office/condo development).

Although Castleberry is one of the city's most walkable and historic urban corridors, filled with early 20th-century warehouses prime for conversion projects, the neighborhood is just starting to see new investment and development for the first time since the recession.

Some residents say the new hotel could help spur redevelopment of The Gulch, a 120-acre former freight yard that remains one of Atlanta's best-known and most complex development sites. Although groups including the Georgia Department of Transportation in recent years have proposed to turn The Gulch into a regional hub called the Multi-Modal Passenger Terminal, there's little political will for that project at the local or state level.

"Nothing has happened," said involved Castleberry Hill resident Jim Schneider. "This [hotel project] might in fact give us that catalyst to make more stuff happen. It could be a real shot in the arm."

Gallman Development has completed some 20 projects in Castleberry Hill over the years, including the \$33 million Castleberry Point development with 110 condos and 33,000 square feet of retail.

Founded in the early 1980s, the



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The planned Castleberry Park project could bring an upscale hotel to downtown.

company specializes in historic renovations, as well as new construction in historic neighborhoods. It considers itself a pioneer in the transformation of industrial space into hip lofts and shops.

Decades ago, that type of development was a strange and new thing," said CEO Bruce Gallman, who worked to get Castleberry Hill listed on the National Register of Historic Places. "We were the

only game in town."

At least one other hotel is planned in downtown near the new stadium.

The Georgia World Congress Center Authority wants to build a new four-star hotel on its campus with 800 to 1,000 rooms. It would sit adjacent to the center's Building C. The project would get underway following demolition of the Georgia Dome. It could open in 2019.

GETTING A RIDE

Lawmakers to revisit regulating ride-sharing services

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The General Assembly is expected to resume a debate this winter over app-based ride-sharing services enthusiasts consider vital to Atlanta's hipster image but detractors worry pose a threat to public safety.

A study committee created by the Georgia House of Representatives will meet this fall to examine how an influx of app-based ride-sharing companies into the state is affecting the existing taxicab and limousine industries.

What could emerge in 2015 is a second attempt to impose the same insurance and licensing requirements on Uber and other ride-sharing services that apply to cabs and limos.

An organized campaign by Uber relying on social networking single-handedly killed a bill aimed at app-based ride-sharing companies during the 2014 legislative session, said Rep. Alan Powell, R-Hartwell, the bill's chief sponsor.

"We got hundreds of emails saying, 'I like my Uber experience. ... We hear you're trying to put Uber out of business,'" said Powell, who will be chairing the upcoming study committee. "I'm not



BYRON E. SMALL

A committee will examine how ride-sharing is affecting cabs and limos.

trying to put anybody out of business. ... To me, it's a public safety issue."

App-based ride-sharing services and the more traditional taxi and limo industries achieve the same result: a customer makes a phone call and gets a ride. But their business models are very different.

Instead of calling a taxi company or limo dispatcher to request service, customers of ride-sharing companies use a mobile app, website or text message.

After the ride, the customer pays automatically by credit card.

Ride-sharing companies don't own cars. Vehicles are provided by the drivers, who must first pass background checks.

That's not enough control by the companies to ensure customer safety,

said Bill Pannell, a lawyer representing a group of Atlanta taxi drivers who filed a lawsuit against Uber this month.

"Try to find Uber's office. See if their telephone number or website works," Pannell said. "They're hiding from their own drivers. They've never met them. [The drivers] have never been interviewed."

Because Uber's drivers are not professionals and, thus, not commercially licensed, Pannell said it's unclear whether their car insurance coverage applies to their passengers.

"Your Uber driver runs into a cement truck, and you're severely injured. Then where are you?" he said.

Pannell said avoiding most of the overhead taxi and limo companies typically pay, including building rental and vehicle fleets, allows Uber to undercut competitors with cheaper fares.

But Uber supporters have a vastly different take on the service.

James Touchton, manager of policy and government affairs for the Council for Quality Growth, said many of the business organization's members have become frequent users of Uber and find the service convenient and inexpensive.

Touchton said Atlanta hotels increasingly are steering guests to Uber because they're asking for it.

"The council is an advocate of the

free-market system," he said. "Other cities have these ride-sharing services. ... If we're going to compete, we need things like Uber without restrictions placed on them."

Touchton, who uses Uber, said he doesn't buy claims the company lacks sufficient quality control to make sure its passengers are safe and well-served.

"I can look at the app, look at the map and see how many drivers are around me," he said. "They'll give you a fair quote, usually \$8 to \$12. [The app] tells you who the driver is [and] what car he has. I can look at the driver's rating system. ... They have an incentive to keep the car clean, to be on time and to be courteous."

While Uber declined to comment on an active lawsuit, spokesperson Taylor Bennett said the company would "vigorously defend the rights of riders to enjoy competition and choice, and for drivers to build their own small businesses."

Bennett said Uber is eager to participate in the study committee's work.

"Forcing antiquated transportation regulations onto modern technologies simply doesn't make sense," the spokesperson said. "We look forward to continuing to work with Chairman Powell on modernizing regulations that promote competition and choice."