

Surf Rowlett: Re-envisioned Sapphire Bay lagoon project to have competition-quality waves

Aug 12, 2019, 7:21am CDT

Oceanfront property in Rowlett?

Not quite, but the re-envisioned Sapphire Bay development the city green-lighted last week will have not only a 6.5-acre Crystal Lagoon amenity, but also a one-of-a-kind, competition-quality surfing venue, developers of the \$1 billion-plus project said at a town hall meeting Thursday night.



Sapphire Bay Land Development LLC, the development partner chosen by the Rowlett City Council, shared its vision for a massive surf- and beach-based mixed-use development intended to serve as a regional and national destination “for local residents, businesses and travelers seeking luxury, adventure and excitement,” according to a news release the city and developer put out on the project.

The bulldozers are set to roll within 30 days on the project, the developers said.

On Aug. 1, the city closed the sale of 117 acres of land, including a deep-water marina, just south of I-30 at Dalrock Road to Sapphire Bay Land Development LLC. Sapphire Bay President [Marc S. English](#) and local real estate developer [Kent Donahue](#) bring more than 40 years’ combined development experience to the project.

The project will incorporate a broad mix of multi-use retail, office, medical, upscale urban family living, high-end condominiums, luxury townhomes and dining and entertainment concepts, English said.

“We have a collaborative vision and mission statement that aligns in perfect unison with that of the city of Rowlett,” English said in prepared remarks.

The \$39 million purchase and financing of the project was facilitated by Marc S. English Capital Holdings I LLC out of Tarrant County. The existing marina was acquired by a local investment group, Sapphire Bay Marina LLC, and will be renamed Sapphire Bay Marina.

English will spearhead all contractual negotiations and manage the construction of all public improvement district amenities, including a 6.5-acre Crystal Lagoon and island show fountain. He will also manage the eventual award of all construction contracts to the multiple contractors that will competitively bid on this project, according to the developer’s agreement with the city.

Donahue will design, oversee and collaborate with design consultants and architects to envision, facilitate and design the project, anchored by a 500-room resort hotel, spa, conference center, roughly 1.4 million square feet of commercial lease space, and a surf-and-beach club featuring not only the Crystal Lagoons amenity, but also a “competition-quality” surfing venue, according to the news release about the project.

“The surf and beach lifestyle is what drives this project, and it will fill the resort hotel, office towers, residential units, shops and restaurants with people who want to experience a tropical beach setting in the heart of North Texas,” Donohue said.

Consulting and management firm VenuBlue, which specializes in beach lifestyle destination attractions, will operate the new development. Donahue said the VenuBlue team, led by John Hughes, has played a key role in helping to develop the vision for the surf and beach club, including the surf venue aimed at all ages and skill levels.

“We’re creating a public immersive experience featuring not only surfing, but also kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding, waterpark features including a lazy river, and

private dining cabanas, anchored by an amazing surf and beach club,” Hughes said.

Sapphire Bay will become Crystal Lagoon’s fourth lagoon so far in Texas, said Lisa Moore, regional director of the partially Dallas-based company.

The Sapphire Bay executive team has tapped 5G Studio Collaborative as the lead architect and Brian Bridgewater with Manhard Consulting as the project’s civil engineer. Lifescapes International, designer of many world-famous Las Vegas pools and amenities, will design the landscaping and tropical garden environment. Martin Brinkerhoff and Associates will be responsible for the design and show production for the island entertainment feature.

The development partners anticipate construction of mass grading and site balancing, along with sanitary sewer, water utilities and paving improvements, will begin immediately upon the city of Rowlett issuing the necessary construction permits.

The project has a tangled history.

The development initially generated intense excitement, but it screeched to a stop when relations soured between the city and the previous developer.

The city in January formally notified the previous developer, Bayside Land Partners LLC and Bayside District Partners LLC, that they allegedly were in default of the Bayside development agreements, and the city filed a lawsuit in state district court in Dallas County seeking relief as a result of the developer’s alleged actions.

As part of the new deal, the lawsuit against the Bayside entities will be dismissed, and the city will be reimbursed for its legal expenses, Jim Grabenhorst, Rowlett’s director of Economic Development, said in a meeting last week.

Much of the prior discord centered around Bayside’s stated desire to remove the Crystal Lagoon from the project. Rowlett city staff and council members balked at that idea, saying the lagoon was a differentiator the development could not do without.

The new Sapphire Bay plan reinstates the large, manmade lagoon, and makes it open to the public, unlike the case with most lagoons of this type.

**Surf Rowlett: Re-envisioned Sapphire Bay lagoon project to have competition-quality waves
12-08-2019**

<https://www.bizjournals.com/dallas/news/2019/08/12/surf-rowlett-sapphire-bay-lagoon.html>