

Scaled-down condo-hotel in works

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NORTH HUTCHINSON ISLAND — A Las Vegas casino owner is giving up his plans to build a condo-hotel on the site of the former Radisson Hotel, but the project may not be dead.

Billionaire Phil Ruffin is selling the site, at 2600 Shorewinds Drive, to West Palm Beach developer George Heaton, said Ruffin's real estate agent, Bob Lowe.

Lowe declined to comment further or to disclose the selling price.

Heaton is proposing a 160-bed condo-hotel, scaled down from the 400-bed condo-hotel he proposed three years ago.

He is retaining the Orchid Beach Resort name.

"The other project that was proposed at the time was too much for the site,"



Heaton said, explaining the downsizing.

The 10-story hotel would include a restaurant, meeting rooms, fitness center and spa on the ground floor, Heaton said. The beach side of the hotel would have a second small, casual restaurant.

The bottom four floors would have the hotel rooms, with 50 condo-hotel rooms on the remaining floors. The 11.8-acre site would have nine cottages for lease on the grounds and a small convenience store.

Condo-hotels look and operate like traditional hotels, but being a condo allows an investor to purchase a room and share the

profit with the hotel when the room is rented.

Ruffin got the county to rezone the property from residential to commercial resort.

County planners met with Heaton two weeks ago to discuss developing the site, senior planner Jeff Johnson said.

The new zoning remains with the property, but Heaton will have to submit a new building application and building plans, Johnson said.

If plans are submitted by Friday, the county Planning and Zoning Commission could discuss the project at its Sept. 15 meeting.

The project also would need County Commission approval.

If approvals are granted, Heaton anticipates construction would begin early next year and last for 15 months.

North Hutchinson

Island has been without a hotel since 2004, when hurricanes Frances and Jeanne destroyed the 150-bed Radisson Hotel.

The owner of the Radisson Hotel sold the property in 2005 for \$17.9 million to Greenwood Communities and Resorts of South Carolina, which intended to build condos. The project fell through.

But by December 2013, Ruffin purchased the property for \$6 million — \$11.9 million less than it had sold for in 2005, according to the Property Appraiser's Office.

Heaton is no stranger to the Treasure Coast.

He owns the Vero Beach Hotel & Spa, about 10 miles north of the North Hutchinson Island property, and Tarpon Flats, a 38-home subdivision on the west side of State Road A1A, just north of the proposed hotel property.