



Cleveland Browns pitch mixed-use lakefront vision, hope to attract Cleveland Clinic, private investors

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By **Michelle Jarboe, The Plain Dealer**

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The Cleveland Browns are making an economic-development play, attempting to lure the private sector to the edge of Lake Erie.

Leaders of the football franchise said Tuesday that they envision a mixed-use project, including athletic fields and a potential sports-medicine or wellness facility, on more than 20 acres north of Cleveland Browns Stadium.

A sketch of the possible lakefront district also shows a 1,000-car parking garage to the south, connected to the stadium by an enclosed pedestrian walkway over the Shoreway.

It's clear the concept is just that -- a vision subject to change and to the whims of a challenging real estate market.

But the Browns believe they can use their local clout and widespread name recognition to attract developers and dollars to an extremely valuable, yet long-neglected, piece of downtown Cleveland.

"We would like to be known as a catalyst," Browns President Mike Holmgren said during a meeting at The Plain Dealer on Tuesday. "We're not developers. We're in the football business ... but we have a wonderful stadium down there and a great piece of property."

The Browns have hired Hammes Co., a company well-versed in sports-centered development, to study the potential of a lakefront site largely owned by the city of Cleveland. Holmgren and the city expect to unveil their plans -- and a bid to bring the Cleveland Clinic to the project -- during a news conference today.



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Hammes Co., Elkus Manfredi Architects

The Cleveland Browns envision a mixed-use lakefront district surrounding their stadium. The football franchise has no interest in becoming a developer or real estate investor, but the Browns hope to use their clout and name recognition to attract private dollars and developers to the waterfront.

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Politicians and planners have floated a procession of lakefront plans over the years. Yet much of Cleveland's downtown waterfront remains undeveloped and inaccessible to people who live and work in the city. The Browns aren't getting into the real estate business, but team leaders want to shepherd private investment, bridging a gulf that local governments and foundations aren't flush enough to fill.

"This is really a commitment to mobilize investors to actually take on development in the area," said Chris Warren, chief of regional development for Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson. "It's really the shift from planning to development."

The Browns' proposal builds on billions of dollars in downtown investment, including a medical mart, a new convention center, a casino and the Flats East Bank project; takes advantage of city-owned property; and focuses attention on a much-needed private-sector commitment to reinventing the waterfront, said Joe Roman, chief executive officer of the Greater Cleveland Partnership, the region's chamber of commerce.

"The brands that get people's attention are the Cleveland Clinic and our health care institutions, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (and Museum) and our sports teams," he said. "So the branding power, the ability to get private investors' attention by leading with private brand interest, is a game changer."

The Browns have asked the Cleveland Clinic, the team's health care provider, to consider a lakefront site for a sports-medicine or wellness facility. Attorney Fred Nance, who represents the Browns, said the Clinic has made no commitment.

In an emailed statement Tuesday, Clinic CEO Toby Cosgrove did not address the hospital system's level of interest.

"We commend the Browns on their dedication to the city of Cleveland and the development of its lakefront," Cosgrove said. "We are very pleased to have been invited to participate in this exciting project."

Nance said the Browns see spurring development as a way to give back to the community, which financed the \$300 million Browns Stadium project in the 1990s. A more vibrant lakefront surely would help the Browns, too, attracting more visitors and enabling the franchise to explore football-related opportunities like a hall of fame at the stadium.

Team officials did not shut the door Tuesday on putting money into projects -- at least, those associated with football -- but they stressed that the Browns are not developers.



Hammes Co., Elkus Manfredi Architects

A rendering shows pedestrian access to Cleveland Browns Stadium and mixed-use buildings to the north, as part of a lakefront development proposal from the football franchise.

