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### Proposed waterfront park to rise in S. Tampa

By GEORGE WILKENS

gwilkens@tampatrib.com

As demolition of the former Georgetown Apartments nears completion, planning is under way for the half of the 164-acre site slated to become South Tampa's second-largest waterfront park.

A fishing pier, canoe launch, nature trails and playground with climbing structures are suggested for the property, according to a draft of proposed improvements. The site also could hold four 300-square-foot picnic shelters, an observation tower, boardwalk, bathrooms, drinking fountains, outdoor shower and benches.

"How many places in South Tampa do you have the opportunity to access the waterfront? Not many," said Tampa Mayor Pam Iorio.

Picnic Island Park, a 100-acre peninsula near Port Tampa with a beach, fishing pier and boat ramp, is South Tampa's largest existing waterfront park.

Development of the sprawling Georgetown site dates to the mid-1960s opening of the popular apartment complex that eventually had 624 units and, often, a waiting list of prospective tenants.

In 2005, the property that stretches between South West Shore Boulevard and Old Tampa Bay was sold to a Fort Lauderdale group planning to raze the apartments and build 1,249 condominiums, townhouses and single-family homes. Georgetown tenants were told to vacate by Oct. 31, 2007.

The development plan fizzled, a victim of the slumping real estate market. In 2008, the property went into foreclosure and the former apartment complex remained empty.

Last October, DeBartolo Development and its partners bought the property from the mortgage holder, Bank of America, for \$30.5 million.

Demolition, which began in early December, has leveled 40 of the 50 two-story red-brick buildings, with completion of the work scheduled by April 1, a DeBartolo spokeswoman said.

Tampa-based DeBartolo has a contract to allow a national nonprofit land conservation organization, The Trust for Public Land, to buy and preserve the undeveloped waterfront half of the acreage.

The former apartment site fronting West Shore Boulevard, just north of Gandy Boulevard, will be redeveloped as a residential community. Details are not finalized.

"The county is in the final throes of their appraisal process," said Greg Chelius, Florida director for The Trust for Public Land, which conserves land for parks, community gardens and the like.

"It's fabulous, and we really, really have our fingers crossed on this one," he said. "Not only will it preserve that property, it will be restored, then be open to the public to enjoy. The passive park is

going to be a nice addition to the city."

In early 2009, Iorio asked The Trust for Public Land to put together a proposal to buy the waterfront acreage in cooperation with Hillsborough County's Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program.

"Anytime you can take a valuable piece of land and preserve it for nature and open up for people to have access, it's big plus," Iorio said. "We have this very rare opportunity to partner with the developer and ELAPP to have the portion along water for passive park use. It will be beneficial to the environment and the community for many generations to come."

A citizens committee that advises ELAPP voted last fall to add Georgetown to a list of properties that need to be acquired.

The draft of proposed improvements accompanying a memorandum to the city from ELAPP acquisition manager Kurt Gremley says the site will be managed as a passive park. He declined comment, saying it would be premature while negotiations are under way.