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ARTICLE: by Brian Brown - reporter

Hampton Inn planned near Battlefield and 65

Perhaps the fourth time is the charm for hotel developer Earl Steinert.

Ross Murray, vice president of R.B. Murray Co., said the Springfield Hampton Inn owner is moving forward with plans to build another Hampton property in south Springfield after Steinert's three recent failed attempts to add to his portfolio.

Steinert last month purchased a 3.65-acre vacant lot southwest of U.S. Highway 65 and East Battlefield Road through EAS Investment Enterprises Inc. Both Murray and Steinert declined to disclose terms of the sale.

The location for the planned hotel is 3370 E. Montclair St. on property purchased Dec. 20 from Wholesale Lumber and Materials Co., according to Greene County assessor records.

"You've probably seen him in and out of the press the last nine months or so looking for sites, but ultimately, this ended up being the one he chose to build his new hotel on," Murray said.

In August, City Council split its vote 4-4 on a proposal to increase the floor area ratio on roughly 2.5 acres across from Millwood Park subdivision, southeast of Highway 65 and Evans Road. Steinert said plans for a five-story, \$6 million hotel on the site were not financially viable without the zoning changes. In November 2011, Steinert also failed to secure a change to the floor-area ratio in the 1900 block of East Republic Road for a 106-room hotel. In both cases, council members who voted against the zoning modifications cited nearby residents' concerns about the hotel towering over their neighborhoods.

Before that, Steinert said he had been looking to build south of James River Freeway and east Campbell Avenue when he became aware of a noncompete clause that prevented him from building a Hampton Inn adjacent to the Holiday Inn Express & Suites at 310 E. Monastery Road. Hampton Hotels were originally a division of Holiday Inn.

Murray said the Montclair property is part of a planned development that allows for a hotel the size Steinert is seeking to build, so issues with zoning shouldn't prevent Steinert from moving forward.

"This property is zoned and ready to go or I wouldn't have bought it," Steinert said, adding the planned development permits up to a 20-story hotel if he wanted.

Steinert said construction on the five-story, 106-room hotel on Montclair – plans are essentially unchanged from previous efforts, according to Steinert – should begin in March and be complete by March 2014.

In addition, Steinert has secured R.B. Murray to sell a portion of the recently purchased property.

"The site is a little bit bigger than he needs for the hotel, so he has retained us to market approximately 1 acre," Murray said of the land that would likely be leased to a restaurant. The land is listed for \$450,000.