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This graphic from Southern Land Company depicts an aerial image of the company's plan to develop the old Imperial Sugar Company property in Sugar Land.

COURTESY: SOUTHERN LAND COMPANY



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Developer lays out plan for Imperial Sugar Company site

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The old will be new again in Sugar Land if the development of the Imperial Sugar Company property proceeds as planned.

Cherokee Investment Partners and Southern Land Company unveiled in a public meeting Wednesday night the final proposal for the development of the century-old Imperial Sugar Company refinery and adjacent land. The proposal will be submitted to the City Council in February.

The refinery, one of Texas' oldest companies, closed in 2003. By 2009, the developer expects to begin the transformation of the property into an old-fashioned neighborhood with community meeting spaces and streets lined with trees. The project, which stretches over 650 acres, would include an estimated 800 to 1,000 new homes as well as commercial retail space.

The unveiling of the proposal comes after final adjustments were made to plans developed during a week-long planning session held in September. The final proposal closely resembles the one created during the planning session, which included public involvement.

"The good news is there's nothing much to report because we're basically doing what we said we would do," Southern Land Company President and CEO Tim Downey told

the audience of about 50 people. Southern Land Company is the Tennessee-based firm which will be overseeing the architecture and design of the development.

Downey said he wants to recreate a Norman Rockwell-type community where people can walk through their neighborhoods to shop and where children can play and ride their bikes.

He also noted that plans for the development project include houses of different colors, building materials and hidden garages. The houses will be "eclectic" but "classic," he said. The development will resemble a subdivision comprised of identical houses in a row, he added.

To help ensure variety in the houses, two-thirds of them will be built by outside contractors. Southern Land Company will then inspect the homes to determine whether they meet certain design elements such as landscaped lawns, cornice detail and window size.

A key element to the neighborhood will be the addition of trees, hedges and flowers. Additionally, houses will be built across the street from the development's lakes so all the residents can see them as they walk by, he said.

By saving as much of the area's natural resources as possible, Downey said he hopes to create a sustainable neighborhood that will preserve the environment for future generations. Creating environmentally friendly neighborhoods has become a recent trend, he mentioned.

"But I don't believe people are actually making it happen. They draw it, but they're not completing it," Downey said. "All of us developers need to stay committed to see it through."

The partnership with Cherokee Investment Partners, and the company's commitment to the project will see the development plan completed, he said.

The developer will also keep and restore the property's historical buildings such as the Char House and the water tower. Downey announced another public planning session will be held to see if more historical buildings and sites could be saved. The dates for that session have not yet been released.

Downey was met with applause when he announced Imperial Sugar has agreed to let them keep the historical sign on the property.

"I wouldn't be so thrilled if it wasn't going to follow the historic plan that they have," Rita Drabek, a retired school teacher who has lived in Sugar Land for 52 years, said after the meeting. "I was here when it was such a neat little town I want to keep as much of that as we can."

Greg Rainwater, project coordinator for ENTACT Service, LLC, the project's environmental consulting firm, also addressed the audience and explained the process the company will take to ensure the safe removal of asbestos from the property. He said they hope to have a contractor selected for the job by late February. He estimated the asbestos removal will be finished by August.