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Former Daniel Payne College site eyed for retreat, homes Developer has plans for 150-acre Daniel Payne land

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The site of the former Daniel Payne College near Pratt City could get new life – after sitting mostly empty for 30 years – with a 150-acre church retreat and retirement community.

An Atlanta developer said he's working with the property's owner, the A.M.E. Church in Alabama, to bring the project to fruition and possibly start construction next spring. Developer Tycam Development currently is working to get the property, located at Cherry Avenue and Daniel Payne Drive, zoned for commercial and residential.

And if all hurdles are passed, Tycam President **Tony Pourhassan** said the deserted 150-acre site could see a new 40,000-square-foot retreat center, the renovation of an existing 400-room dormitory, space for office and retail, and roughly 170 new homes for retired A.M.E. Church clergy in Alabama.

Pourhassan referred questions about the project's value to Bishop **James L. Davis**, who leads the Alabama district for the church. He did not return phone calls in time for press. The community would be called Daniel Payne Legacy Village, said Pourhassan, and will also boast nearly 80 acres of green and recreation space.

Initial opposition about the project came from surrounding neighborhoods, but only because the full details weren't presented when the zoning process began, said **Leroy Bandy**, president of the Central Pratt City Neighborhood Association. But after a public meeting earlier this fall and the A.M.E. Church showing interesting in working with the neighborhood, most of the opposition has dissipated, he said.

"They've been coming in and they want to work with the Pratt community," said Bandy. "I've been here all my life, and I think it's a good thing. I'd rather see that than anything else."

The idea is a first for the A.M.E. Church, Pourhassan said. Since many pastors and bishops live on church property and the mandatory retirement age of the A.M.E.'s clergy is 70, most pastors and bishops retire without homes. And a lot of money is spent by the church on travel expenses for lodgings at retreats around the country. If Daniel Payne Legacy Village is successful in Birmingham, the church will look to develop similar communities on other college campuses it owns in other districts, he said.

Daniel Payne College was a historically black college founded in 1889 in Selma and owned by the A.M.E. Church in Alabama, according to an Internet search. After several relocations, in 1974 it moved to its North Birmingham campus, but many of the buildings were severely damaged in a 1977 tornado.

By 1979, financial problems forced the college to close its doors and file for bankruptcy. The church's Alabama district had its headquarters on the campus until last year, when it moved to downtown Birmingham.

Pourhassan said his company plans to open an office in Birmingham during the construction of the project, which will initially employ about 50 people. In addition to a portfolio of several mixed-use developments in Georgia, Pourhassan is a home builder and owner of Highlight Homes near Atlanta.

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