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Spanish-Designed City Project Canceled

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A rendering of the city designed by HCP Architecture & Engineering firm.

A Spanish architecture firm has won a state contest to design a new, sustainable city on the banks of the Volga, but the designs won't be realized since the land on which the new city was to be built is now being sold in pieces at an auction.

The Malaga-based HCP Architecture & Engineering firm and MGPM architects from Mytishchi, a suburb of Moscow, beat out 39 other contenders to win the urban development contest this summer. The architects drafted the designs for the city, which would be near Nizhny Novgorod, about 420 kilometers from Moscow.

This is the third time that the Russian Housing Development Foundation and the Russian Academy of Architecture and Construction Sciences held such a competition, but the first time that a foreign firm had won.

"The construction boom in our country, a fact that has not happened in other countries, and the experience we have acquired in the development of large projects makes us very valued

outside of Spain," said Emad Fikry, partner at HCP Architecture & Engineering.

The annual public contest is part of the Housing Foundation's initiative to encourage the development of more energy-efficient, comfortable and affordable housing on its land plots.

"The point of the project is to stimulate architects to create interesting new projects," the foundation's spokeswoman, Anastasia Lim, said. "The idea is to create low-rise houses so that people don't have to live in city centers but in areas that are next to the cities."

Previous contest winners offered their designs for developing the foundation's land in the Moscow and Novosibirsk regions. The project near the Moscow region city of Istra is practically complete, and the project in the Novosibirsk region has wrapped up its project documentation phase, Lim said.

But the designs for the new city near Nizhny Novgorod won't be used because the Russian Housing Development Foundation deemed the 833-hectare property, which was used as a basis for the designs, too large and carved it up into separate plots for sale at an ongoing auction. Six of the land plots have already been sold to investors.

The winning proposal from MGPM envisioned a town that would have 10,000 housing units to accommodate up to 35,000 residents. According to Fikry, half the housing units would be low-rise apartment buildings. The city would also have terraced plots and isolated villas.

Initial investments in the city were pegged at 2 million euros ($2.5 million).

Contest entries were judged based on architectural quality, economic feasibility and quantity of social infrastructure.

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