

AUSTIN BUSINESS JOURNAL \$50M condo project slated for S. Lamar

The developer of the Austin City Lofts is planning a \$50 million transformation of a prime site just south of downtown Austin.

CLB Partners Ltd. will build 110 condo units coupled with 9,000 square feet of retail on a 2.5-acre site on South Lamar Boulevard. Units will range from 800 to 1,650 square feet in size and be priced from the upper \$200,000s to the mid-\$500,000s.

The six-story project will feature condos on top of ground-floor retail and underground parking -- along with a courtyard area highlighted by a pool, hot tub, fire pit, fireplace and outdoor cooking area.

The site "has everything," says Bobby Nail, a partner in the Austin office of CLB Partners. "It has hike-and-bike trails across the street, golf across the street and the best restaurant next to it ... and unobstructed views of downtown."

CLB has named the project Austin Park Village, playing off its location near Town Lake and other amenities.

Construction is scheduled to begin in the first quarter of 2006 and expected to take 14 months to complete. Austin-based Rhode:Hurt is the project's architect.

Principal Brett Rhode says the design will be "subdued, but elegant," making use of natural stone and high-quality materials.

Willy Scott and the Pfluger family, who had a long-term ground lease on the land, will own and manage the retail portion of the project. Scott will be seeking small "boutique" retailers.

The land that CLB Partners is set to close on in January includes the historic Paggi House restaurant, which occupies one of the oldest homes in Travis County. CLB wants to go to great lengths to preserve and enhance what surrounds Paggi House.

"I think it all works together," says Rick Engel, owner of Paggi House and president of Engel Management Service Inc.

Engel says he and the developer plan to work together closely as the project is developed. Neighbors have been enthusiastic about the upcoming changes, he says, and are glad a height variance won't be necessary.

Meanwhile, a mustard-yellow office building and Wendy's restaurant now on the land will be torn down. A second phase, not yet planned, might be built where a Taco Cabana now stands.

That Wendy's location is the second-oldest in Austin. Local franchisee Pisces Food LP says it was contemplating the future of that store when CLB shared its plans. Now, it will play a small, unspecified role in the project and would like to find an alternate location in the area.

"It's really an opportunity for a higher and better use for this piece of property with all that's going on downtown," says Dave Near, owner of Pisces Food.

About 900 residential units have been added in downtown Austin in the past five years, Austin Mayor Will Wynn says. Another 240 units are under construction, while a whopping 2,000 units are in various stages of planning.

But Nail isn't worried about competition or overbuilding.

"When I moved here in 1999, 22 projects were being talked about. Austin City Lofts was the only one built," Nail says. "There are a lot of projects being talked about right now. They're very hard to execute. The good thing about CLB is we have a history of executing and doing projects people love."

CLB, which has offices in Dallas and Solana Beach, Calif., built the \$42 million, 82-unit Austin City Lofts. It also might build about 100 condos alongside Gables Residential Trust on Cesar Chavez Street.

"We at CLB think Austin, Texas, is one of the best places to be in the country," Nail says. "And we're going to continue to invest millions of dollars."