

Residential tower, 800-space parking garage proposed for Grace Street lot across from Carpenter Theatre

By NED OLIVER Richmond Times-Dispatch | Posted: Monday, December 5, 2016 10:35 pm

A Richmond development partnership is floating a plan to construct an \$86 million residential high-rise across from the Dominion Arts Center's Carpenter Theatre downtown that would include ground-floor retail and an 800-space parking garage.

The principals of City Center LLC said designs remain very much in flux, but showed the Planning Commission a rendering Monday that depicts an 18-story structure on the block bounded by Grace, Sixth, Seventh and Franklin streets.

The property is owned by the city and currently houses a surface parking lot and a parking garage built in the 1920s that is largely disused due to structural problems.

"We have looked at a lot of different options," said Robert P. Englander Jr. of CathFord Consulting. "What we know is that it's going to be a contemporary building with a good bit of glass and deep terraces for all the residences, but other than that we have not foreclosed any other options."

CathFord Consulting has partnered with Taylor and Parrish Construction and the architectural firm Price Studios to pursue the project under the auspices of City Center. Englander said there also are an unspecified number of investors backing the project, whom he declined to name.

The partnership is seeking approval from city officials to purchase the property for \$3.95 million.

The Planning Commission unanimously recommended approval of the sale Monday with little discussion other than to remark on the size and scale of the potential development.

"It's a massive project," said commission Chairman Rodney Poole.

"It is a massive project," Englander said.

He noted that it would be developed in phases, with the parking garage and retail space constructed first, followed by the tower apartments.

The proposed contract between the development group and the city specifies the entire project would be completed within five years and have a taxable value of at least \$86 million.



City Center - above

Developers recently shared this conceptual rendering of an 18-story residential building on the block bounded by Grace, Franklin, Sixth and Seventh streets. They said plans are still very fluid and the building's height and shape could change.

“We actually anticipate we will exceed that number by the time we finish,” Englander said.

The developers also have committed to including at least 28,000 square feet of ground-floor retail space fronting Grace and potentially either Sixth or Seventh street. Their contract also requires a minimum of at least 372,000 square feet of residential and commercial space.

He said all of the contemplated apartments and condominiums would feature large outdoor spaces.

“The condominiums being built today in the urban core don’t speak to the outdoor space,” he said. “We have what we’re calling outdoor living rooms in each of these apartments, which will be an average of 300 to 400 square feet — big outdoor living spaces.”

He said plans also call for topping the parking garage portion of the structure with a park.

The City Council is scheduled to vote on the sale next week.

Only one person spoke on the development during the Planning Commission’s public comment period Monday: Cyane Crump, the executive director of the Historic Richmond Foundation.

She encouraged the developers to retain the facade of the parking deck, which she said is considered historic.

Englander said his team has looked into it but because of the outdated dimension of the building, its reuse could prove challenging.

He said they will explore the prospect more if the project wins approval.

“We would like to keep the building,” he said.