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Major redevelopment planned for Civic Apartments

By Aimee Curl

Thanks to a partnership between Gerding/Edlen Development Co. and the Housing Authority of Portland, the Civic Apartments will be replaced by a unique combination of affordable housing units, condominiums and ground-floor retail.

The Housing Authority of Portland acquired the property, located just east of PGE Park on Southwest 18th Avenue between Yamhill and Morrison streets, in the late 1990s.

HAP Executive Director Steve Rudman said the complex, which has fallen into disrepair, is one of the agency's more problematic properties.

"We always knew down the road that redevelopment was an option. We didn't want to be slum landlords. It's important to us to have decent and safe housing," he said. "We had the choice of redeveloping it or selling it, and talked to a number of developers before choosing Gerding/Edlen."

Plans for redeveloping the property call for building nearly three times as many units as exist there today. The structure will be torn down and replaced with 140 affordable housing units, 15 stories of market-rate condominiums, 40,000 square feet of retail space and three levels of below-ground parking. A pedestrian-only street will run through the property, dividing the two structures.

Tom Cody, a Gerding/Edlen principal, said the hope is that the pedestrian street will help bring the area to life.

"This concept is important for the project and important for the neighborhood," he said. "Today, it's an impermeable, monolithic building. Bifurcating the site with a pedestrian street will make it inclusionary, warm and activated by retailers."

Cody said the ground-floor space will likely be filled with a combination of community-based and national-credit retailers and restaurants.

Rudman said HAP likes the idea of having commercial space as part of the project.

"In a dense neighborhood, it's important that there are goods and services people can access," he said.

Cody said the project was appealing to Gerding/Edlen for a number of reasons.

"It's not often you get the opportunity to redevelop a site like this," he said. "To the extent that we can create a development that facilitates high-quality

affordable housing, that's something that's exciting to us. And not only can we replace a marginal apartment building with 140 affordable housing units, but we can leverage it with retail and for-sale units, of which there are few in the neighborhood."

Cody said the condominiums will likely be small and priced in the \$200,000 range to attract people currently living in the neighborhood.

"We're definitely trying to target the first-time homebuyer and workforce housing with the market-rate project," he said.

Rudman said the mix of incomes planned for the Civic is part of a broader agency movement toward integration.

"We want to try and find ways that don't isolate or marginalize lower income developments from other people in the community," he said.

While this is the first time HAP has worked with Gerding/Edlen, it's not the first time the agency has worked with a private developer on a large project. Gerding/Edlen will develop both the affordable and market-rate portions of the project, but HAP will retain ownership of the affordable building.

"(The partnership) allows us a certain amount of risk sharing and the ability to meet multiple objectives," Rudman said. "We have been impressed with Gerding/Edlen's desire to focus on the whole block and the entire neighborhood to ensure that this becomes a cornerstone development that starts the renaissance of this area."

"What we're hoping to do is really take this area to the next level," Cody said. "We see this site as a strategic site. It's equidistant between the Pearl District, the Central Business District and Northwest 23rd (Avenue). If we do what we want to do, we think it will drive development that will bridge out to the surrounding properties and fill the gap between these areas."

Rudman said it was important for HAP to keep a presence in the neighborhood.

"So as the neighborhood continues to change, we can ensure there will be affordable housing there in the future," he said. "This is one of the first, but I think we're going to see more. The area is very well positioned for redevelopment."

SERA Architects Inc. is the designer on the project. Hoffman Construction Co. is the general contractor. Residents of the Civic are currently being relocated.

The project is tentatively projected for completion in September 2006.

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