

Lifestyle Communities eyes Arena District headquarters

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by [Brian R. Ball](#)

Business First

Suburban condo and apartment developer Lifestyle Communities Ltd. plans to bring its headquarters to downtown Columbus as the anchor of a 125,000-square-foot office building proposed in the Arena District.

The builder plans to move its 164 employees into 40,000 square feet of the seven-story building planned for 230 West St. The project is contingent on an incentive deal before City Council, which calls for the developer to create 74 jobs over the next several years.

Lifestyle Communities CEO Michael DeAscentis Jr. said moving downtown - likely in the second quarter of 2008 - would let the company's employees have some fun while working in the mixed-use district developed by Nationwide Realty Investors Ltd.

"Locating a work environment within an entertainment district is appealing to us," DeAscentis said. "We really saw a lot of dynamics with what Nationwide Realty has created."

Lifestyle Communities last year paid an undisclosed sum for naming rights to the former PromoWest Pavilion concert venue in the Arena District.

DeAscentis said the Arena District offices, which would be partially owned by Lifestyle's principals, also would feature a bar dubbed Goat on the ground floor. The developer put Goat bars in two condominium communities it built near New Albany and Gahanna, and a third Goat bar is planned for a Hilliard community under construction.

"It fits with our entertainment initiative," DeAscentis said.

The timing is right

Nationwide Realty and Lifestyle Communities have worked on the office deal for more than six months. The homebuilder also considered buying an office building at 101 E. Town St. It consolidated its operations in 2004 into 30,000 square feet at 2800 Corporate Exchange Drive.

Mayor Michael B. Coleman's administration has proposed a downtown office incentive for the move to the Arena District that could return about \$500,000 over eight years to Lifestyle Communities if it meets growth projections.

The incentive is equal to half of the personal income taxes generated by new jobs it promises to create.

"These incentives are based on the performance of the company, so we are improving the economy with added jobs and protecting the taxpayers by cautious use of incentives," Coleman said in a statement.

Brian J. Ellis, president of Nationwide Realty, welcomes 65,000 square feet of contiguous office space to lease in the Lifestyle Communities-anchored building.

"The timing is great for us because we just have nooks and crannies of office space left to lease," he said. "We've been targeting the start of a new building, but we didn't want to start before we had an anchor tenant."

Ellis said 1.4 million square feet of space is built or planned for the Arena District and about 91 percent is occupied. That suggests it has 125,000 square feet of vacant retail and office space scattered around the district.

Construction on the building designed by Lupton Rausch Architects Inc. won't get under way until March, Ellis said. The project must meet the approval of the city's Downtown Commission, which is expected to review the design Nov. 16.

"From our standpoint," Ellis said, "we'd rather have the building sooner than later."

Nationwide Realty is building a 272-slot expansion to a nearby 1,542-space parking garage to serve the Lifestyle Communities project and a Marconi Boulevard building nearing completion for Nationwide Mutual Insurance Co., the developer's parent company.

The building will have 62 parking spaces underground.

Exceeding expectations

Ellis said Nationwide Realty has proposals out to two law and accounting firms to take space on the top floors of the building.

"There are a number of prospects out there," he said.

Also, he expects more restaurants to commit to the district in coming months to diversify the dining mix.

He said the amount of commercial development in the Arena District could approach 1.75 million square feet, up to 250,000 square feet more than originally projected. It could also end up with 650 residences, about twice the original expectation.

"We're only a few sites from being done," Ellis said. "I think the market has accepted the products we've offered very well."

Lifestyle Communities Ltd.

Business: Develops condo and apartment projects in suburban Columbus, Dayton and Lexington, Ky.

Based: 2800 Corporate Exchange Drive, Columbus

Founded: 1996

Employees: More than 180

Area employees: 164

Web site: lifestylecommunities.com

2005 revenue: \$52.23 million

2005 profit: Would not disclose