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North Bank tower is next up for Downtown

Arena District condos to be near old Pen site



The planned Condominiums at North Bank Park

By Mike Pramik

Not too long ago, history buffs were stumping for the preservation of the old Ohio Penitentiary.

Columbus Mayor Michael B. Coleman wasn't one of them.

The mayor said yesterday that Nationwide Realty Investors' announcement of a flashy, 20-story condominium tower is further evidence that the Arena District has transformed the former pen site.

"The state penitentiary was a place where people were jailed, where the electric chair was used," Coleman said. "It was in rubble. It was decaying, and it pulled down the rest of the city."

Nationwide Realty Investors said yesterday that it plans to spend more than \$50 million to build the Condominiums at North Bank Park, a 109-unit residential project that will be across Neil Avenue from where the old pen once stood. The project's backers think it will add a healthy dash of bling to the district.

"It's a huge shot in the arm for Downtown," Coleman said.

In addition to the tower, the project will include rehabilitation of the adjoining Bundy Building at the northwest corner of Spring Street and Neil Avenue.

The tower portion of the complex will be six stories shorter than Miranova, the luxury highrise that opened in 2000 on the southern edge of Downtown.

"In this current wave of Downtown housing we haven't really seen anything aside from Miranova go that high," said Marc Conte, with the Downtown Development Resource Center.

Nationwide Realty Investors, the developer of the Arena District, plans to begin work March 1 and have the first units open in about a year, pending approval by the Downtown Commission.

Nationwide Realty president Brian Ellis said his firm almost turned the Bundy Building into an office structure. But negotia-

tions with a tenant broke down. “We had committed to the prospect, but in hindsight it was fortuitous,” Ellis said. “We’re going to do a much better project.

“I think the best use is residential, and that’s what we’re going to do.”

Ellis said the company will begin to set prices for the condos in March, but they’ll likely start at more than \$300,000 and top \$1 million.

The Dispatch Printing Company, publisher of The Dispatch, is a 10 percent partner in the project.

Owners’ property taxes will be waived for the first 10 years, consistent with how other Downtown condo projects have been structured. That incentive has helped lead to more than 1,100 units being built

Downtown since 2002. About 2,500 more are in the pipeline.

The tower will contain 88 two and three-bedroom condos. The 80-year-old, five-story warehouse will be renovated to include 21 loft-style condos and parking for owners of all the units.

The tower will offer owners huge walls of glass in their condos and a fitness center, conference room, guest residence and movie-screening room in the common areas. The warehouse will be encased in brick to fit in with other Arena District buildings.

But the star attraction is expected to be the view from the lofts and most of the tower condos.

“You’ll be able to see the LeVeque Tower from 90 percent of the units,” said Scott Ralston,

a principal with 360 Architects.

To give the warehouse condos only Downtown views, architect Dan Hanes concealed parking spaces in the west side of the warehouse. The entire first and second floors of the warehouse will be parking, as will the western sides of the third and fourth floors, allowing condos on those floors to face Downtown.

The entire fifth floor will be loft-style condos.

“The moment we showed it, it was very clear to everyone on our team, including the developer, that this was a unique and grand solution,” Ralston said. “The key was not focusing on cars but keeping the focus on the views from the units.”

Ellis said a handful of the condos in the tower will face Huntington Park, the planned

home for the Columbus Clippers.

Nationwide Realty plans to demolish a small building on the north side of the Bundy Building.

The condominium project will be the third residential component of the Arena District. The others are the 252-unit Arena Crossing apartment complex, which Ellis said is 99 percent leased.

Nationwide Realty Investors also has developed Burnham Square, a 98-unit condominium project. Ellis said the 74th unit was sold this week.

“We want to make sure we stay in the market by unveiling this new project,” Ellis said. ■

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