

## Luxury downtown condos proposed

*Seventeen-floor tower added to plans for Queen & Chestnut art museum, garage.*

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Developers on Wednesday unveiled plans for a 17-story luxury condominium tower in downtown Lancaster. Ten stories of residential condos would sit atop a seven-story parking garage and an expanded Lancaster Art Museum at the northeast corner of Queen and Chestnut streets, just north of the Hotel Brunswick.

The site is now a parking lot owned by the Red Rose Transit Authority.

Marketing of the condominiums, with prices starting just under \$500,000, is expected to begin next month. Construction could begin next summer. The project is expected to cost \$20 million to \$25 million.

"We believe we have an exciting, vibrant project that will really go well in downtown Lancaster," Steve Risk, of Quarryville-based **Paul Risk Associates**, told members of the Red Rose Transit Authority board Wednesday evening.

The board voted unanimously to enter into a development agreement with Risk and his Museum Tower LP team.

Joining Risk in the partnership are architects John de Vitry and Ken Hammel and real estate agent Marilyn Berger.

Risk, whose company has developed more than 4,000 housing units, including Spring Run at Willow Valley, said the tower will offer natural light to the condominiums.

One of the biggest selling points, he said, would be a rooftop garden connected to the eighth floor. The garden, on top of the parking garage, would be 21,000-square-feet, or nearly a half-acre.

The garden would have a 500-foot walking and jogging track around the edge and a two-lane lap pool.

"It's going to be a park on a roof," Risk said.

Berger said there is a pent-up demand for luxury condominiums in Lancaster. She has a list of about 60 people who have expressed interest in moving from the suburbs into the city.

The condos would range in size from 1,150 square feet to penthouses of as much as 4,000 square feet, said Hammel. Sizes and configurations will depend on buyers in a nearly custom-build arrangement, he said.

Condo prices would begin at less than \$500,000 for the smaller units and "then they will go up much higher," said Risk, who stopped short of giving a top price.

Berger is planning an initial sales meeting at the Hamilton Club on Jan. 15 to present the project to prospective buyers.

Some other high-end condominium projects have been proposed in the city, but have stalled due to lack of parking, said Hammel. That problem is solved with this project attached to the parking garage, he said.

Risk acknowledged the current dire economic situation, but sounded optimistic for the future of the project.

"Right now is not a very good market for selling units, but we're not talking about moving in today. We're talking about moving in more than a year from now," he said.

And, said Risk, if efforts to market the condominiums do not go well, the garage and art museum can still go forward with their parts of the project. The infrastructure would be in place to build the tower later, he said.

The Red Rose Transit Authority had announced plans for a garage in conjunction with the art museum last year.

The project provides additional space along North Queen Street that would be connected to the former Empire TV building, which the art museum purchased and is renovating.

The project also provides the Red Rose Transit Authority with an extension of its nearby Queen Street Station. RRTA would have three additional bus bays and access from the present bus station to East Chestnut Street.



The 450-space garage would provide additional parking downtown and a source of revenue for the often cash-strapped transit authority. Plans call for the Lancaster Parking Authority to be contracted to operate the garage.

RRTA expects to spend \$13 million to \$15 million to build the garage and leased space for the museum. The condo developers would pay the authority \$700,000 for the right to build the condominiums on top of the garage project.

Earlier this year, a previous private-sector developer announced plans to construct a 10-story building at the site in conjunction with the museum and the transit authority. That multi-use project would have included office and retail spaces in addition to residential condominiums.

Those plans fell through when an anchor tenant backed out of the project, said David Kilmer, RRTA executive director.

RRTA again sought proposals for the project. The Museum Towers partnership was the only developer to respond.

Kilmer on Wednesday praised the new proposal.

"It's a win-win for everybody. Nobody loses in this project," he said, saying the transit authority, art museum and city will all benefit.

"It's a great use of the space for the community."

Risk said plans have been developed in consultation with city officials. The project would require city approval. The partners plan to seek zoning approvals next month, including a height variance. They would seek preliminary plan approvals later this spring.

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