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30-story Condo Tower is Proposed

*A developer wants to build on a parking lot near Rittenhouse Sq.
Prices for the units start at \$2 million.*

By: Henry J. Holcomb, Inquirer Staff Writer

Developer Tom Scannapieco is busy this week lining up support from city officials and neighbors for a 30-story residential condominium tower near Rittenhouse Square.

Like the condos Scannapieco is now building in New Hope, where he lives, these are not for the average Joe or Susan.

Each unit would occupy an entire floor, or 4,000 square feet, and cost from \$2 million to \$4 million, depending on how high they are. The top two floors may be combined into an 8,000- square-foot penthouse that could fetch \$10 million or more.

“There will be no one-bedroom or studio units. It will be very high-end, very exclusive,” Scannapieco said.

His partner on the project is Joseph Zuritsky, chief executive officer of Parkway Corp., which owns the site, now a parking lot, at the southwest corner of 17th and Rittenhouse Square Street.

“I was 16 when we bought the site in the mid-1950s and demolished buildings for the parking lot,” said Zuritsky, whose parents started the business nearly 80 years ago. He learned the parking business managing the lot, and for decades “has wanted to build something exquisite there ... but the market has not been right.”

The Center City Residents Association was to have seen the plans next week, but that session has been postponed until after the holidays.

City Commerce Director James J. Cuorato got a preview Tuesday and said: “It looks great. ... The building would fit into the neighborhood.”

Scannapieco will need to get a variance from the city zoning board to exceed the present three-story height limit at the site. Cuorato said he would support granting that permission. The site is across from the 30- story Medical Tower Building, 255 S. 17th Street.

The \$78 million proposal, called 1706 Rittenhouse Square Street, “demonstrates the strength of the Center City residential market right now,” Cuorato said.

It is the second major condo project to be proposed this month. Harold “Hal” Wheeler and partners are also seeking permission to build an even larger \$140 million complex with 150 units, at the northwest corner of 18th and Walnut Streets, on the square.

Scannapieco’s building would be a block off the square, on the block-long street that runs alongside the Art Alliance Building between 17th and 18th.

Arriving residents and their guests will deposit their car — or SUV — into an automated parking system, which will store it on a rack below. New to Philadelphia, such systems are operating in Europe and several U.S. cities.

“There will be no scratches or dents,” Scannapieco said. When departing, a resident can order retrieval of the car from the elevator. Within a minute and a half, it will be delivered, facing the street.

“If you want to leave a briefcase in the car overnight, it will be safe. ... It’s a neat system,” Scannapieco said. There will be two parking slots per unit, plus a few guest slots.

There will be a concierge to greet residents. A pair of elevators will whisk them to their units. There will be a back elevator, to get caterers to the kitchen without traipsing through the unit’s entrance foyer.

The foyer leads into a large living room, which opens into an outdoor terrace large enough for dining, said David F. Ertz, a partner in Cope Linder Architects, designer of the proposed building.

The building will have no interior columns, giving Daroff Design Inc., which is working with Cope Linder on the project, a lot of flexibility in arranging each unit.

“We have worked hard to knit the design into the neighborhood street,” said architect Ian Cope of Philadelphia’s Cope Linder.

Scannapieco is targeting traditional Rittenhouse Square residents, many of whom, he said, face expensive assessments for improvements to older condominium buildings. He thinks fullfloor units, with large rooms for entertaining, will also appeal to suburban empty nesters.

The cost of the new building will be partially offset by a 10- year abatement on property taxes under a city program that promotes new construction.

Cuorato said the project might draw objections from condo owners across Rittenhouse Square Street, who would lose their southern view.

And there may be protests from businesses whose customers use the small parking lot. Zuritsky said he was working to provide more parking nearby.

Scheduled for completion in 2005, the building will offer “understated elegance,” said Cope, “and privacy you can’t get in a larger building.”

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