

Bell Tower design: Vote on which is better

Vertical lines added to design to address review board critics

By John Rebchook

Originally published 09:05 p.m., July 25, 2008

Updated 10:15 a.m., July 27, 2008

The proposed \$300 million, 34-story Bell Tower development along Cherry Creek at Speer Boulevard and Larimer Street has been made to look "taller and thinner" by the use of more clear glass and vertical lines running the length of the building, the tower's architect said on Friday.

The changes should address criticisms received last month by members of the Lower Downtown Design Review Board, architect Curt Fentress said.

The latest version will be presented to the board on Aug. 7.

"They used the word 'feather-like' to describe what they wanted, and that is not usually a word you associate with a 400-foot-tall building," Fentress said at his office.

He placed a model of his firm's latest design next to the previous model to display the differences.

"It's like dressing for a party with clothes that make you feel taller and thinner," Fentress said. "It's like the pinstripe suit I'm wearing. Before it was more of a Scottish plaid. The building will have a pinstripe that will run from the lapel to the cuffs."

He said he also may insert pieces of stainless steel in the aluminum stripes, as he did at the 1999 Broadway office tower he designed, to "catch the light as the sun moves across the sky and dances off the tower."

Fentress said the "fractured" design from the two-story balconies along the 35 units captures the "ruggedness of the Colorado Rocky Mountains," and will also give buyers the "sense they are living on a cliff. It redefines living in the sky."

Fentress also noted that 89 percent of the land on the site remains open. "I don't know how you could have any more open space and still have a building," Fentress said.

City planner Tyler Gibbs just received a package of the new design and said it is "premature and probably inappropriate" to comment before he prepares a staff report.

The building is being proposed by developer Buzz Geller. "Iconic buildings are always more expensive to build, because they never fit the mold," Geller said. "This building will be even harder and more expensive because each and every floor will be different as far as layout goes. It will truly be like 35 custom homes."

Geller said that because the tower sits on a 45-degree angle on the site, the widest perspective of the building will be from the Auraria campus. The much more typical view for people driving on Speer will be of a slender building, he said.

In addition, the five-story office building on the site will have a brick exterior instead of the original granite on the part that faces the LoDo area, with a glass facade across from the tower. This addresses another concern of some of the board members, said Ned Kirschbaum, technical design director and principal of Fentress Architects.

And the land around the office building has been reconfigured to "be more of a place, instead of a path," as board member and architect Joseph Poli had suggested last month, Kirschbaum said.

Geller is betting that people will be willing to pay in the neighborhood of \$7.5 million to \$25 million for the units.

Developments of such unique design often command enormous premiums when sold, so despite their initial price, they often prove to be excellent investments, Geller said.

rebhookj@RockyMountain News

© Rocky Mountain News