

Developer shelves LoDo 34-story condo tower

Geller plans shorter office building instead

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Photo by George Kochaniec Jr.

Buzz Geller's plans for the \$300 million Bell Tower were turned down by the Lower Downtown Design Review Board.

Plans for a 34-story, \$300 million condo tower in lower downtown were shot down by a city design review board Thursday because of its "massive" presence.

The Lower Downtown Design Review Board asked developer Buzz Geller to revise the plans for the Bell Tower.

Instead, Geller said he will revert to "option two,"

which basically calls for taking the tower and shrinking it to eight stories and spreading the square footage across the entire site at Speer Boulevard and Walnut (Market) Street. It will eliminate the previous plan to create a park along Cherry Creek.

The new building primarily will be an office building, possibly with some penthouse-style condo units, as opposed to the most expensive condo tower ever planned in Denver. The proposed office building across the creek from the tower was given positive feedback by the board, but since Geller plans to increase its size, he will need to resubmit it.

The entire board, with the exception of board member and architect Joseph Poli, voted against approving the tower, calling it too massive for the "gateway" site. The board asked for Geller to submit a plan for a slimmer building, but after the meeting he said that would not make economic sense.

"I can't ask buyers to pay for 7,500 square feet and only give them 6,500 square feet," he said. He wanted to sell the units for about \$1,000 per square foot.

A more conventional tower won't work in this market, he said.

"It has to be as edgy as possible," Geller said.

Curt Fentress created the contemporary design.

"We're not a tribunal of taste," member Tee

Cowperthwaite said. "I think it is a cool building. It kind of breaks my heart to vote against it."

He said he would love to see Geller construct the building, with its shardlike exterior created by large patios and terraces, somewhere else in downtown.

Board member Judy Morley said the board had "bent over backwards" to come up with a plan that would work for Geller, but he didn't deliver a slender building.

City Councilman Charlie Brown said the rejection means a "big loss for Denver in terms of construction jobs, property taxes and sales revenues," and this is a missed opportunity, as not many \$300 million buildings are being proposed in the U.S.

"From an economic development perspective this sends a message to the development community that perhaps we are not as friendly and 'open for business' as we say we are," Brown said in a statement.

Cathy Krendl, who lives in the nearby Larimer Place, said Geller wasn't delivering a "slender and elegant" building, and applauded the board for opposing it.

"It bothers me that a developer can tell the City Council one thing to get their plans through, and then think during the process they can change it," she said after the meeting.

She described Geller's proposed tower as "that

ugly green thing." She said she doesn't mind that the area will lose a park in the process.

Geller said he appreciated all the hard work by the board, although he said he has problems with the process, which took a year and cost him more than \$1 million.