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Trump sets sights on new tower

N.Y. tycoon aiming to construct tallest building in Denver

By John Rebchook, Rocky Mountain News

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Donald Trump is looking to build the tallest building in Denver, next to the historic El Jebel building at the edge of downtown.

While not a done deal, Donald Trump's team is focusing its efforts on developing a luxury hotel and condominium complex on the parking lot next to the Moorish-style, onion-shaped domed building built in 1906 at 1770 Sherman St.

"I think this has the potential to be one of the sexiest projects we have seen in years," said hospitality consultant John Montgomery, who has seen an early rendering of the Trump tower by Denver architect David Owen Tryba.

"It sits up there like a rocket that is about to launch," added Montgomery, president of Horwath Horizon Hospitality Consulting/Montgomery & Associates.

Experts estimate the value of the building, which would soar 715 feet from the bottom to the spires on the roof, is in the neighborhood of \$150 million. The height would make it a foot taller than the current tallest building in Denver, the 56-story Republic Plaza.

The historic El Jebel building would be incorporated into the new tower planned by the New York developer who hosts *The Apprentice* show on NBC.

Tryba said that the building would be about 60 stories tall, although the exact number is being worked out.

He said the contemporary design would "complement and be a juxtaposition to the historic El Jebel building." The El Jebel, or "the mountain" in Arabic, would be restored to its former glory inside and out, he said.

El Jebel space would be available for meeting and other functions for hotel guests, he said.

The building would be the maximum height allowed under a planned unit development agreement approved by the City Council three years ago. The PUD allows a 650-foot-tall building, plus a 65-foot antenna to bring it to 715 feet.

This month, Trump, in a statement, reiterated his plans to develop a skyscraper in Denver, although he didn't identify the site. Trump's bid for the \$1 billion redevelopment of the Denver Union Station was rejected. The team only answered a request for qualifications for Union Station with six paragraphs, which was considered inadequate.

George Thorn, of Mile High Properties, was surprised that Trump is honing in on El Jebel.

"I would think there are some other CBD (central business district) sites that would be better," Thorn said. "The height thing must be the appeal of the location."

And while the number of hotel rooms and condos being planned is still being worked out, Tryba noted it will "be a relatively small hotel. It's mostly going to be a residential project."



David Owen Tryba
Architects ©

The proposed Trump hotel and condominium project is the tallest building, right, in a rendering of what the complex would look like against the the Denver skyline. Plans call for the tower, which would be built next to the El Jebel building, to be 715 feet high, making it the tallest building in Denver.

He said the Trump tower would complement the planned Four Seasons along 14th Street across from the Denver Performing Arts Complex. The Four Seasons, to the top of its spire, could actually be taller than the proposed Trump Tower, although it would have fewer stories.

Jeff Selby, co-developer of the Four Seasons planned at 14th and Arapahoe streets, said the El Jebel site is a "terrific" site for the Trump tower.

"It will be good for Denver and will help that area way up on the hill," Selby said. "And at that location, the hotel would not be competition for the Four Seasons. Trump and his organization are focusing on emerging top-tier urban centers. It's great that we're on his radar screen."

Trump's partners in the deal are the Barry Group Investment in Aurora, headed by former Denver Bronco Odell Barry, and the Bayrock Group, which is based in the Trump Tower in New York. Barry declined to comment Friday.

"We believe (El Jebel) is a great site, and (we) are just waiting for the partners (who own it) to work things out," Felix Satter, head of Bayrock, wrote in an e-mail to the *Rocky Mountain News* on Friday. Satter was traveling in Moscow with Trump's son, Donald Trump Jr.

Martin Wohnlich, a co-owner of El Jebel, noted that 67 percent of the owners have agreed to sell the site to the Trump/Bayrock/Barry team, and they are trying to persuade the lone dissenter to sell.

The holdout, Trent Cole, owns a third of the site. Cole's lawyer didn't return calls Friday.

The Bayrock/Trump team is offering \$22 million for the site, documents obtained by the *News* show.

Wohnlich said the Trump deal is "what is best for the city of Denver. Think of what you want about Donald Trump personally, but he does wonderful, high-quality, utterly spectacular developments. And Bayrock has a lot of experience of incorporating historic buildings with new buildings, so we are thrilled that they will be able to honor the commitment we made to the city to restore El Jebel."

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