

Rocky Mountain News

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Block off 16th gets face-lift

Development may be 'catalyst' for 15th Street change

By John Rebchook, Rocky Mountain News
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A block of buildings off downtown Denver's 16th Street Mall will be getting a \$350 million face-lift.

Developer Evan Makovsky bought 75 percent of what is known as Block 162, bordered by 15th, Welton and California streets. He plans a development of about a million square feet that could include a hotel, retail, residential and offices.

"This site is a true gold mine," said Kelly Brough, Mayor John Hickenlooper's chief of staff, noting there has been public and private investment in the area of about \$1.7 billion.

The Makovsky site does not include the deteriorating and mostly empty Fontius building along the 16th Street Mall or the adjacent Washington/McClintock on the mall, another historic building.

The Fontius building has long been considered one of the biggest eyesores in downtown Denver because of about two decades of neglect.

Gary Cook, who owns Fontius, did not return a phone call Tuesday, or several others in recent weeks.

Makovsky said that not owning Fontius does not affect the scope of his project.

His land includes the former Colonial Hotel and the Bank of Denver building, both of which will be razed. He also bought an adjacent parking lot.

Because Fontius and McClintock are historic buildings, they may not be demolished, Makovsky said. Also, because new buildings are not allowed to cast long shadows along the 16th Street Mall, tall buildings in his development need to be built closer to 15th Street, he said.

Makovsky said he expects the tallest building to be around 40 stories.

And while the land could handle a total of about 1.6 million square feet, realistically, he will develop about a million square feet. Construction is expected to start in two or three years and take about two years to complete.

"I think the reality is that we would have retail on the main floor, office above the retail on one side, and a hotel (over) the retail, with residential that is bridged between the two," said Makovsky, who has spent the past three years putting together the deal.

Makovsky said Walter Isenberg, principal of Denver-based Sage Hospitality, will work with him on the hotel portion, and architect Brian Klipp is helping him develop a master plan.

Isenberg said he has yet to speak to any hotel companies.

"This is a great site and is great for Denver," Isenberg said. "It is taking a very blighted part of our central core and is going to revitalize it into a really exciting project."

Ken Schroepel, on his [Denverinfill.com](http://denverinfill.com) blog, said Makovsky's development, along with the Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center, will create a "vital pedestrian link between the Convention Center and the 16th Street Mall. Additionally, this could potentially be the catalyst that triggers a domino effect along 15th Street that would transform that street into an attractive, pedestrian-friendly, vibrant downtown street."



Steven R. Nickerson
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Evan Makovsky shows a diagram of his planned development - at 15th and California streets - during a news conference Tuesday at the Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center.

Makovsky said the community has invested about \$1 billion in the Convention Center and the nearby Hyatt, yet people are afraid to walk from 15th Street to the 16th Street Mall.

"To me, redeveloping this block responsibly can make our downtown a more welcoming and livable community, which will help the property owners as well as all of the residents and visitors," Makovsky said.

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