

Big 'n' Tall Tempe

SOUTH BANK BRINGS A FRESH LOOK TO THE LAST PIECE OF LAKEFRONT PROPERTY NEAR DOWNTOWN TEMPE. DESIGN TALKS BEGIN THIS FALL, WITH CONSTRUCTION SET FOR COMPLETION IN LATE 2009.

POLITICS AND ECONOMICS had seemingly doomed Tempe's area east of Rural Road along the north side of Rio Salado Parkway for years.

Deals that included hotel rooms – anyone remember the Peabody project? – and waterfront fun – how about The Pier at Town Lake? – were scuttled by Tempe City Council bickering and public subsidies considered too expensive to bear.

But the latest incarnation – towers of swanky condominiums, office space, retail shops and hotel rooms – offers so much more, say officials affiliated with South Bank. And this time, the developer (not taxpayers) is paying \$25 million for the public infrastructure.

"We're in a down market, and we're getting our ducks in a row [for the upswing]," developer Peter Wolff said at a recent groundbreaking for the project. "We're very well-positioned to take advantage of the market."

South Bank is the brainchild of Scottsdale's Wolff Company and Barker Pacific Group of Los Angeles. The project calls for 3.6 million square feet of residential, office, retail and hotel space on 27.3 acres. That's three times the size of north Phoenix's Desert Ridge Marketplace on 75 percent less land. Developers bought the land from its

previous owners for \$43 million.

All of that would be contained in sleek-looking stacks of concrete, glass and steel – turned just so, and at varying heights, to face north across Tempe Town Lake and Loop 202.

Proponents say the location is a major selling point for potential residents and businesses. The freeway will funnel up to 500,000 cars per day into the project's line-of-sight, giving drivers a glimpse of towers flanking a central plaza, public parks, a boardwalk and a pier, according to initial renderings.

The architecture team includes Circle West, the Scottsdale company that designed Market Street for DC Ranch, a pedestrian-friendly project on the southeast corner of Thompson Peak Parkway and Pima Road in North Scottsdale.

Much of the company's design work is ongoing, says Tempe senior planner Ryan Levesque, who oversees South Bank for the city. Wolff has won approval for building heights (the tallest of which will reach 27 stories), but the project's exact look won't come out until this fall, he says.

Think Playa del Norte, the development east of Rural Road on the north shore of Tempe Town Lake, only bigger.

"It's probably twice as large, and it really brings to life the Town Lake from the

west end to the east end in terms of activity," Levesque says.

The early versions already have won over experts at Arizona State University. Wellington "Duke" Reiter, a former MIT professor and Boston architect who heads ASU's architecture college, called South Bank's initial design "ambitious... but mainstream with a green consciousness."

"It's not urban in the New York or Manhattan sense," Reiter says. "It's urbanism in the appropriate, Phoenix sense."

The deeper message South Bank sends is its affect on Tempe's evolution, Reiter adds.

"It's setting the urban design agenda," he says. "It's making this place into a real city."

But the issue of affordability lingers. Developers paid almost \$1.6 million per acre for the site. Although price-points for residential, retail and office space were not available at press time, Wolff says he is doing all he can "to offer the greatest range possible."

Reiter acknowledges the affordability issue created by several swanky condo projects coming online at once (see page 56 for a status report of Tempe's projects). He's confident it will iron itself out eventually: "It's a question for the region, but as more mixed-use comes in, people will have affordable options."

— Adam Klawonn



A rendering of the South Bank development in Tempe