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Foss building gets go-ahead

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Rain collected from the roofs of a new mixed use building to be built on downtown Tacoma's Thea Foss Waterway will flow through a decorative water feature in the building's courtyard before being used to irrigate the plants scattered around the site.

The rain collection system is one of several environmentally friendly features incorporated into the new structure.

The five-story building, yet to be formally named, will also feature areas designed for watercraft and rental and storage, ground-floor retail spaces and a public esplanade. Developers are planning to landscape view corridors both north and south of the structure with drought-tolerant native plants.

The Foss Waterway Development Authority on Wednesday evening approved conceptual plans for the structure to be built on the waterway's west side just north of the 21st Street cable-stayed bridge.

That approval allows the developers, Tacoma's Prium Cos., to begin excavating the site in preparation for the formal construction start next spring. The company wants to remove potentially contaminated soil and replace it with clean earth before taking title to the property.

The Foss Waterway, the closest to downtown of several Tacoma Tideflats inlets from Commencement Bay, is being gentrified with condominiums, restaurants, retail shops and museums replacing lumber mills and other industries.

The new building will be the first new structure on the Foss to include office space, about 30,000 square feet. The majority of the structure, like most other new Foss Waterway buildings, will be devoted to condominiums, said Gail Merth, the building's architect.

On the waterway side, the U-shaped building will include a courtyard where the rainwater will be collected in a clear cistern before flowing into a pool. From there, the water will be slowly released into a channel that extends from the courtyard to a waterway viewing deck on the building's east side. The water will flow through an interactive art piece of metal rods fashioned to look like reeds. From there, the water will flow into a collection basin where it will feed an irrigation system.

The structure will include 250 parking spaces on four floors.

The building's Dock Street facade will include retail spaces and work-live lofts for residents with at-home businesses. On the floors nearest the ground, the new structure will be fronted with brick and stone to tie the structure visually to the nearby red-brick Albers Mill and the masonry Union Station Courthouse west of the BNSF Railway tracks from the waterway.

The upper levels will be clad with curtain walls of glass and metal to give residents in the 75 to 80 condominium units views of the waterway, Mount Rainier and downtown Tacoma. Prium hasn't announced the final pricing for the condominium units.

The development company, which is building hundreds of units in Tacoma, will reportedly move its headquarters to the office portion of the new building.

The development authority will sell the site to Prium for \$2 million next spring if the building and environmental permits for the structure proceed on schedule, said Don Meyer, the authority's executive director.

Given an April 2007 closing, the building is expected to be available for occupancy sometime in mid- to late 2008.

Mixed uses on the Foss

Building area: 200,000 square feet
Offices: 30,000 square feet
Retail: 8,000 square feet
Residential: 80,000 square feet
Common area: 12,500 square feet
Parking: 250 stalls.
Excavation start: Soon
Construction start: April 2007
Completion: Mid- to late 2008
Developer: Prium Companies, Tacoma



Sources: ESRI, GDT
AMANDA RAYMOND/The News Tribune