



Bethlehem developer now seeking 12-story building on South Side



A Bethlehem developer has submitted new plans for a 12-story South Side building, pictured above, where he has previous approval to build a 7-story building. (Image courtesy of Howard Kulp Architects)



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A condemned building at 30 W. Fourth St. in Bethlehem and Benner's previous proposal for a new seven-story building on the site.

A Bethlehem developer has submitted new plans for a 12-story South Side building where he's already received approval to build a seven-story structure.

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photograph of submitted rendering

Dennis Benner is now seeking approval to build a 12-story building at West Fourth and Vine streets. He received approval for the other project in April.

Benner's plans include demolishing a second building to allow for the new project, which would include a restaurant or retail space on the first floor plus 11 stories of apartments.

"It's a substantial change in the project," said Alicia Karner, Bethlehem's community and economic development director. "It's several stories higher and the footprint is far larger."

City zoning allows for such buildings in the neighborhood. Benner also has proposed a 13-story building across West Fourth Street and a seven-story building at Third and New streets. All three proposed buildings are within the state's City Revitalization and Improvement Zone that allows developers to use some state and local taxes for construction.

Benner revised plans for the Fourth and Vine streets building because he was able to buy the house next door to his property, which he said was in serious disrepair.

"I didn't want to have a really bad property next to something that was brand new," he said.

The two buildings Benner is seeking to demolish are 30 W. Fourth St. — a small commercial building that's condemned — and 24 W. Fourth St., a home that Benner said the city has considered for condemnation.

The proposal includes 22 apartments and a roof deck. Nine of the floors would have a pair of two-bedroom apartments while the top two floors would feature two three-bedroom apartments.

Benner said he doesn't yet have a commercial tenant lined up for the first-floor space. He said he expects the apartments to appeal to both Lehigh University students and young professionals. His proposed 13-story building also would have similarly targeted apartments.

"You're talking about walls of glass here — I don't think these will be hard to rent," Benner said.

The plans for the new building will go before the city's Historic Conservation District board Monday. The board, which is an advisory panel to Bethlehem City Council, will rule whether the building's design is appropriate in the South Bethlehem Historic Conservation District.

The board conditionally approved Benner's seven-story building in March, but asked the developer to recess the upper floors and incorporate more materials than just brick in its design.

Benner said he's incorporated both suggestions in the new design.

City council also approved Benner's previous design. Council President J. William Reynolds didn't return a call Thursday on the new building design.

Benner said he's still pursuing plans for his other two proposed South Side buildings.

"I have a lot of things in motion," he said.
