

Developer delves into \$45M South Side mixed use complex

By [Brian Pedersen](#)

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Courtesy of Howard Kulp Architects: Artist rendering of proposed mixed-use development at Third and New Streets in Bethlehem.

A developer is launching a \$45 million mixed use project he envisioned five years ago in South Side Bethlehem, with construction planned to start next spring.

For part of the project, Dennis Benner, a Bethlehem developer and attorney, said he plans to build a 12-story tower around the First Reformed Church on Fourth Street that he bought about five years ago. Here, near Lehigh University and Moravian College, Benner plans to create student housing with 335 beds.

Benner also plans to build – at the corner of New and Third streets near the entrance to the Fahy Bridge – a seven-story building with retail and commercial space on the first floor, office space on the next four floors and two stories of high-end apartments on the upper floors. These units would be ideal for visiting professors and young professionals, Benner said.

On the retail side of the project in the seven-story building, Benner said he has plans for multiple

The Bethlehem Parking Authority would build a more than 500-space parking deck that will connect the two buildings, Benner said.

"It's going to transform South Bethlehem as we know it," Benner said. "I want a college town down there."

Benner, a Lehigh University graduate, said the project would "re-urbanize" South Bethlehem, with one part of South Side Bethlehem already defined by the Sands Casino and the other by Lehigh University.

"There's enormous unlocked potential," Benner said. "I think the students are crying out for new and multiple uses."

He said he has multiple tenants in mind.

Benner said the assembly of parcels has taken a while and that the project could fit into the City Revitalization and Improvement Zone designation if the city earns the approval from the state. The CRIZ would allow certain state and local taxes generated by businesses in the zone to be used to finance construction and development.

Even if the city does not gain CRIZ approval, Benner said, he still would move forward.

"It was good five years ago and it's still good today," he said.

Over the next several months, he said, he would be taking the project through the land development process with the city.

Howard Kulp Architects of Allentown is the architect for the project, and Jim Eck, president of Quadratus Construction Management Inc., based in the Lehigh Valley, is the construction manager.