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Business - Monday, July 7, 2003

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New building concept on Mason Mixed-use retail residential project overlooks Lee Martinez Park

By **KIRSTEN ORSINI-MEINHARD**
KirstenOrsini@coloradoan.com

Within the span of four buildings, Fort Collins residents soon will be able to buy a Cookie Monster ice cream drink, find homeopathic remedies and learn how to tell a story.



MASON STREET NORTH ARTIST'S RENDERING

Oh, and buy a loft, where there will be permanent access to all these features.

It's all part of the Mason Street North Project, a nearly 2-acre commercial and residential development planned for the north side of Old Town on Mason Court and Cherry Street, overlooking Lee Martinez Park.

The 42,000-square-foot project -- spearheaded by Boulder-based Wonderland Hill Development Co. -- includes three two- to three-story buildings connected by a plaza in between, said Jim Leach, president of Wonderland Hill.

Designed by Boulder-based Wolff/Lyon Architects, the buildings will house about 20 condo-style lofts ranging in price from \$150,000 to \$300,000, said Leach.

"If we can get Mason Street going, that's going to then provide a lot of energy for the north end for development and redevelopment," he said.



The bottom levels of each building will hold a variety of tenants, ranging from Windsor-based Capri Coffee Break -- which makes a Cookie Monster drink -- to a group of holistic medicine practitioners, said Mickey Willis, owner of Fort Collins-based Paradigm Realty.

Willis' company, along with Wonderland Hill and Wolff/Lyon, has formed the Mason Street LLC to oversee the project's development.

Other tenants for the three buildings include a sustainable-development business and a garden design center, although Willis declined to release company names before the project is built.

Parking for the project includes a 21-space lot under one of the buildings and an outdoor cobblestone parking area modeled after an Italian piazza, said Willis.

"That will help to define the project -- all the spaces between the buildings will become walkways or parkways," he said.

The project has already been through a public hearing for land use and the city is currently waiting for finalized development plans, said Fort Collins city planner Steve Olt.

Developers are aiming for a fall groundbreaking and Willis said the project should take about 10 to 12 months to build.

Mason Street LLC isn't the first to announce plans to bring upscale commercial and residential buildings to downtown Fort Collins, similar to those found in larger cities.

A development project called Cortina is in the works for the southwest corner of Howes Street and Canyon Avenue, combining 20 multifamily lofts with 23,000 square feet of retail and office space.

That project might be built as early as next fall and take about 18 months, say project officials.

Lofts for both developments have already been pre-leased; about 10 have been sold for the Mason Street North Project, said Willis.

The commercial space has also been filled, although Mason Street LLC officials said it was harder to find tenants for the 18,000-square-foot retail space.

That's because commercial tenants have a different lease, allowing them to buy into Mason Street LLC while paying rent, making them part of the cooperative ownership structure, said Willis. "Everyone will walk around with a sense of ownership and everyone will want to succeed," he said.

Wonderland Hill is also redeveloping the CV Axle building adjacent to the Mason Street property. When it's finished, the building will double in size to 8,400 square feet and the exterior will be a glass and brick structure resembling other Old Town buildings, Willis said.

That building will eventually house the Fort Collins-based National Association for Interpretation, which teaches people how to better express themselves and tell stories while working at nature centers, parks and museums.

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