

June 20, 2007

Euro-style townhouses coming to Delridge area

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Rendering courtesy of Joseph Hurley Architects [\[enlarge\]](#)

The Barton Street Lofts are slated to break ground in July, with the first units to be completed next spring.

Can European-style townhouses draw middle-class homebuyers to Delridge? Developer Bill Parks is about to find out.

Parks expects to break ground soon on 14 townhouses at 18th Avenue Southwest and Southwest Barton Street, just north of White Center. The dense development on three former single-family lots will encircle a 2,500-square-foot courtyard. There will be a carport in the alley behind the townhouses.

The units will vary in color, shape and height. The 1,100-square-foot units will have two full-size floors and a mezzanine.

Project architect Joseph Hurley said he was influenced by books about Italian hill towns, where homes were built close together and engaged with their surroundings.

“You have to adjust to how exposed to the outside you are,” Hurley said about those who live in such homes. “That’s not exactly an American style of living.”

Hurley and Parks, who heads Crocus Development, worked together on a similar project called Fremont Lofts. Hurley, now principal of Joseph Hurley Architects, was with Johnston Architects at the time.

That eight-unit project was built along a landscaped driveway that also serves as a courtyard, with balconies and entrances facing it. The Fremont units fetch more than \$700,000 today, but the Barton Street Lofts are slated to cost about half that.

“This is an affordable project,” Hurley said, though this being Seattle, “you’ve got to put quotes around that.”

Creating a sense of community is one goal, along with taking a stand against rote design. Residential developers have a habit of “using the same design over and over again,” Hurley said, based on narrow notions of what’s likely to sell.

“Realtors just want you to do what the last guy did because it made them money,” Hurley said. This is why a lot of small multifamily complexes are given over to automobiles, with a strip of pavement running down the middle of the lot.

“I think it’s an ugly business,” Hurley said. “Because of legal stuff and zoning codes you have a perfect storm of standards that create standard, soulless four-plexes that go up everywhere.”

Hurley is trying to avoid that with Barton Street Lofts, but “it’s very complicated to do a one-off project like this.”

One risk is the location.

“Eighteenth and Barton is a pretty marginal area,” Hurley said, noting a drug house that appeared to be operating half a block away from the site.

There’s also the matter of getting the design right. New Urbanism, with its emphasis on traditional neighborhood design, appeals to Hurley’s sense of community but its historical look doesn’t jibe with his more contemporary sensibilities. Very modern architecture can work in some neighborhoods, but it wasn’t a good fit for Delridge.

“Trying to strike that balance is hard to do,” Hurley said. “If you try and blend those things — traditional and modern — you can do something contemporary that can have wide appeal.”

Exteriors of the slab-on-grade townhouses will be a mix of concrete board and corrugated metal siding. Big banks of windows will be strung together to allow lots of natural light. The main living spaces will be on the ground level, and the bedrooms will be upstairs, separated by a mezzanine that covers about 50 percent of the floor plate. The mezzanine can be used as another bedroom, an office or a media area.

The courtyard, designed by landscape architect Maggie Johnson of MEJLA, will have large trees for privacy, paving stones, benches and paths, and park-style barbecue grills.

“Most people just send a guy in a truck to a nursery to see what’s on sale,” Hurley said.

The project will include a number of sustainable elements, though details haven’t been worked out yet.

Parks, the developer, said the project is “a wonderful opportunity to redefine some of the development standards” in Delridge. “From a business standpoint, it’s to show you can do that in that kind of neighborhood.”

With about 90 units either under construction or in development in the immediate area, Parks wants his project to stand out. And, as with Fremont Lofts, he hopes Barton Street Lofts will raise the bar for design in the neighborhood.

“Our hope is that we’re not going to be just one island of architectural product,” he said. “We hope other people will consider doing this type of project.”

Phillipa Nye, a project manager for the Delridge Neighborhoods Development Association, said new townhouses in the area so far are “pretty cookie-cutter.” DNDA, a private non-profit that develops

affordable housing, was recently outbid for the 239-unit West Ridge Park, the largest private apartment complex in Delridge, which is now being converted to condos.

Developers “apparently have figured out how to make townhouses work here, but not apartments,” Nye said.

Rapid gentrification in Delridge has pushed up land costs, sending DNDA to look for projects outside the neighborhood.

The Seattle Housing Authority is adding 720 subsidized rental units at High Point as well as some market-rate units, but most new housing in the neighborhood will be for sale.

“Delridge is like what southeast Seattle and the Central District are going through,” said Ron Angeles, Delridge neighborhood district coordinator for the city Department Neighborhoods. “We’re the last frontier.”

The townhouses he’s seen going up are an improvement over some “kind of tacky” apartments that have been built in recent years. “The townhouses have some quality to them.”

Barton Street Lofts are slated to break ground in the middle of July, with the first units to be completed next spring.

Parks, who purchased the site from his brother, Russell, sees the project fostering a bit of urban renewal, drawing together loft owners in the project as well as bringing them into the community.

“If somebody’s looking for a price point in the mid-threes — if someone is looking for a little house, and that’s the ceiling in their minds — then I would hope they consider moving to White Center,” Parks said, citing its merits as a diverse community.

“With a typical builder product, I don’t think people would move to White Center for that,” he said.