



We Are Columbia

Vertical Development: Your Questions Answered

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BACKGROUND

What is Vertical Development?

Vertical development, or infill, is an urban planning approach that maximizes land use by building vertically on top of existing structures. It allows for more dense populations and can be designed to encourage an urban live-work environment. Vertical development also makes use of existing infrastructure, such as roads and utilities.

Why is the City Considering Vertical Development?

The results of the recent, City-supported Midlands Reality Check, conducted by the South Carolina Urban Land Institute, suggest that the Midlands' governmental, community, business and educational leaders support the creation of a dense, urban, live-work environment in Columbia's central business district. Thus, one of the goals was to identify one or more concepts which may lead to vertical development at and above City-owned garages.

The City of Columbia believes vertical development will:

1. Create new economic development opportunities;
2. Support and attract knowledge-based economy jobs which will assist in creating intellectual capital throughout the region;
3. Encourage development where infrastructure is already in place;
4. Improve the quality of life for the citizens of Columbia and the Midlands region by providing downtown residential and/or relevant commercial opportunities.

The City issued an RFP in late 2014 seeking developers interested in making such a project a reality. The RFP project team recommended approval by City Council of the proposal submitted by Hallmark Homes International ("Hallmark" or the "Developer"). On May 19, City Council approved the grant of air rights to Hallmark relating to the development of up to six named City garages, and now that company is beginning its due diligence to determine if the projects can become a reality. The first project, if undertaken, is expected to be constructed above the Lady Street Garage.

What is the benefit to the City of allowing these projects to proceed?

The residential development will be built using an "air rights development agreement", which will result in the residential component (e.g., apartments) being subject to ad valorem real property tax located on top of publicly-owned property that is not currently being taxed. In addition, the project will add to an already vibrant and ever-changing downtown and create a new customer base for our downtown businesses and facilities.



In 2013, Midlands-area stakeholders participated in an Urban Land Institute "Reality Check" process that allowed residents to envision how the region should grow.



The City of Columbia has within its inventory six parking garages that can be considered for vertical development. Analysis of each garage will be performed to determine the feasibility of each project.

About the Development Project

Are there really going to be apartments built on top of six City garages?

The Developer has identified six garages for possible development and intends to evaluate each garage individually. The first garage to be evaluated is the Lady Street garage, located at the corner of Lady and Assembly streets. The City will develop a contract for each garage which will address the particular needs of each facility, including structural capability; availability of parking; and other issues related to specific garages.

Will construction of the apartment shut down the garage?

No. The Developer will need space on the roof of the garage to begin building the base of the apartment complex. If the Developer moves forward with construction, there may be times when some areas within the garage will be temporarily blocked off for safety reasons, but accommodations will be made for monthly and hourly parkers. The City and Developer recognize the demands that exist related to each parking structure and will work to ensure inconveniences are kept to a minimum. That may involve some work being scheduled at nights and weekends as feasible to accommodate parking and traffic needs within each area.

What It Means for Garage Users

Will this project completely fill up the garages?

No. For instance, the City is mindful that the Capital Center and many other office buildings in the area rely on the Lady Street garage. There needs to be spaces available for future tenants in those offices. The City's Parking Services Department is working to develop parking partnerships with public and private parking providers to continue to find additional parking opportunities and also for ways to maximize the parking opportunities that already exist. Fortunately, the peak demands of the residential project and business community occur at different times of the day, which allows the needs of both user types to be accommodated.

Will the apartment dwellers use the same elevators that are now in the garages?

The specifics of the design have not been worked out; however, there is a commitment to adding elevator capacity to the facility in order to accommodate the residential project. While doing so, there is a good possibility that the existing garage elevators and stairwells will be replaced with more modern and larger units.

Will I lose my parking to an apartment dweller?

As previously stated, the peak demands of the residential user and business user occur at different times of the day. The City intends to accommodate the needs of both parties and is comfortable that existing contracts can be honored for the time periods that apply to the specific user's need.

If I rent one of the apartments, will I save money on my parking in the City garage?

No. Those living in the apartments will pay regular parking rates.

How will all those cars fit in a garage already crowded?

There have been extensive studies performed over the past several months that capture supply/demand at all times (day and night over a 7 day period). Those studies reflect there are adequate spaces available at any given time to accommodate the cross over between the residential and business user.

Other Questions

Will there be any major changes in the operation of the Lady Street garage?

Through attrition, the City has already begun to reduce the number of reserved spaces in the Lady Street garage. City Parking Services staff is already working with current customers to consolidate reserved spaces to maximize the capacity of the garage. This has been a process the City has been prioritizing in all its garages to help meet the current parking demand throughout the system. There is a desire to accommodate public parking spaces on the ground and first floor levels of the garage to better support the businesses within walking distance of the garage. Currently, the public parking spaces in the Lady Street garage are on the upper levels, making it inconvenient and less inviting for public parkers wanting to patronize our downtown businesses. In addition, the city is looking to create spaces within our garage system for a car share program targeted at the downtown resident or guest who may not own a car but desires to rent one for a quick trip occasionally. The ability to do so via a car share program has proven successful in other areas similar in nature.

Are there any other changes envisioned?

The latest major change has been the extra attention given to keeping the garage cleaner and improving the overall environment for all parking customers. One major benefit of vertical construction will be the addition of apartments above the roof level, meaning that level will be in the shade; no one likes to park their car in the sun in August and September in Columbia!

Another benefit of having residents use the garage outside of business hours will be the increased presence of people at all hours, which is a natural deterrent of criminal activity. Additional safety in the garage during non-business hours is a benefit for all users.

What about the traffic?

As a city increases in residential density, vehicle mileage decreases because destinations are closer, so people can walk or bike to nearby services or take accessible transit. Transit connections can become more cost effective and common when density increases. In addition, multifamily developments are known to have lower car ownership than single-family home tracts.

Will the projects be deemed “student housing”?

The City and Developer have agreed that these projects will be market rate housing, targeted to working professionals and empty nesters. While student housing is a market thriving in Columbia, these are not geared at that same market and are instead a way to recruit and retain talent once students graduate.

When will the evaluation of the other parking structures occur?

The City and Developer are working together to evaluate the Lady Street garage first. As this process occurs, there will be on-going discussions about the remaining garages to determine the most practical order of consideration or which of the other garages (if any) should be subject to further development. There are many factors that will contribute to those decisions, to include existing and future parking demands, zoning requirements of specific areas, parking bond obligations /requirements, specific uses of a garage, age and condition of the garage, etc.

How does the public stay informed of the process?

As contemplated by the air rights development agreement between the City and the Developer, as the evaluation continues for each specific garage, a project-specific agreement will be negotiated for each garage development project and will require City Council approval. City Council and the public will be updated on any discussions or actions regarding these agreements through City Council Meetings. City Council meets on the first and third Tuesday of each month, and Council agendas are posted to the City’s website the Friday prior to each meeting.