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A daring design for downtown

Famous firm crafts vision for 47-story tower

By Shonda Novak
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

A renowned architectural firm that created one of the world's tallest buildings is designing what could become Austin's tallest high-rise — a sleek, flared glass tower that would dramatically alter downtown's skyline.

The mixed-use tower being designed by Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects is set to rise 47 stories on the northeast corner of Fifth Street and Congress Avenue, next to the 26-story Bank of America building. Senior principals Cesar Pelli and Fred Clarke and firm principal Bill Butler will lead the design team.

Austin developer Tom Stacy plans to break ground by mid-2007.

The City of Austin Planning Commission recommended a zoning change Tuesday that would allow Stacy to build a tower with more than 1 million square feet. Planning Commissioner Cid Galindo praised the project for its "vision and audacity."

The zoning request next goes to the City Council, which has

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The proposed 47-story high-rise for the northeast corner of Fifth Street and Congress Avenue would sit between the Bank of America building and the Frost Bank Tower.

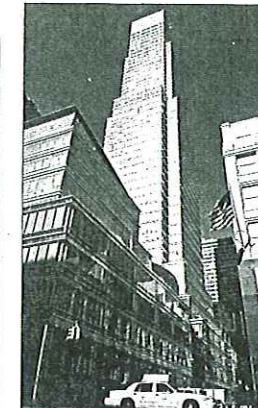
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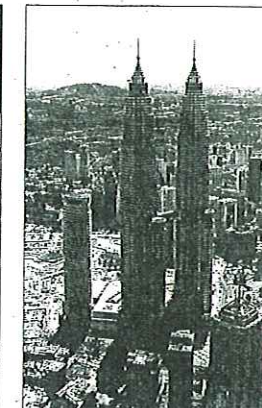
Architects' other creations



© PELLI CLARKE PELLI ARCHITECTS
Cesar Pelli is the creator of the design for New York's World Financial Center and Winter Garden, shown in this artist's rendering.



Daniel Acker, BLOOMBERG NEWS
731 Lexington Ave. in New York holds office space and condos.



BFB PLC
The Petronas Towers scrape the sky in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.



MANDARIN ORIENTAL HOTEL
The Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Tokyo has 41 stories.

VISION: Developer asked for 'prettiest building you can'

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the final say.

The Fifth & Congress tower — preliminarily named after its location — is one in a string of dramatic designs for the architectural firm.

The firm designed the landmark twin 89-story Petronas Towers in Malaysia, which soar 1,483 feet skyward. It was the tallest structure in the world when it was built in 1998. It's now the second-tallest.

Other projects designed by the New Haven, Conn.-based firm include the Museum of Modern Art and Museum Tower in New York, the 41-story Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Tokyo, the Reagan Washington National Airport and the 31-story Torre Libertad tower in Mexico City.

Both Clarke and Butler have Texas ties: Clarke is a graduate of the University of Texas School of Architecture, and Butler is a San Antonio native and a Rice University graduate.

They, along with Cesar Pelli, also worked on projects at Rice University and the master plan

Tell us what you think of the proposed design at statesman.com/talkofaustin.

for the UT campus.

For the Fifth & Congress tower, Stacy's instructions to the architects were straightforward: "Design me the prettiest building you can for this site," said Elizabeth Christian, a spokeswoman for Stacy.

Said Stacy: "These guys have been developing buildings for the past 20 years, and we have the opportunity to bring that experience, creativity and expertise to Austin."

The result will be a high-rise that is "a world-class building molded to fit the culture, needs and desires of the Austin community," Stacy said. "This is not New York City, Malaysia or Hong Kong. The project has to embrace the vision of the community for that location." Preliminary designs call for the tower to rise up to 700 feet, housing 925,000 square feet of condominiums, retail space and offices or a hotel. The building

could be in a rivalry for the title of the city's tallest: another developer plans a condominium tower several blocks away that also could be up to 700 feet tall.

Stacy plans 180 to 200 condominiums priced at \$500 to \$600 a square foot, putting the average unit, 1,150 square feet, at up to almost \$700,000 — in line with many of downtown's newer condos. The condos will be on the tower's top floors, starting above the height of the Bank of America building.

Included in the project is a 12-story parking garage with 1,200 spaces at Fifth and Brazos streets. Stacy hopes to start construction on it later this year. Even though it is recommending approval of the tower, the Planning Commission postponed action on the garage to explore concerns raised by residents of the nearby Brazos Lofts.

Stacy said he is considering putting moderately priced apartments atop the garage, although that may not be economically feasible because of downtown's high land prices.

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Condo projects get zoning support

The Austin Planning Commission on Tuesday recommended zoning changes that would allow two other condominium projects to proceed.

The first is the Four Seasons-branded condominium tower that could rise 28 stories next to the Four Seasons hotel on San Jacinto Boulevard. The building, being developed by Austin-based Ardent Residential, would have 17 floors of apartments and 10 to 11 floors of condominiums, said Steve Drenner, an attorney for the developers.

Existing zoning on the site limits height to 318 feet; the change would allow a 400,000-square-foot building that could rise more than 400 feet, Drenner said.

The second is an upscale condominium project on 4½ acres at the northeast corner of Interstate 35 and East Riverside Drive, just east of downtown. The Wellesley Inns & Suites on the site would be razed to make way for the project, which would

have four condo buildings of varying heights.

The developer, Constellation Property Group, plans a 190-foot tower, a 60-foot building and two 40-story structures near Town Lake. Constellation, an Australian firm with U.S. headquarters in San Diego, also plans to build a trail adjacent to the project that ultimately would connect to the hike-and-bike trail.

Nearby residents have raised concerns about the project's density and height, along with the increased traffic it would create at an intersection that is already congested.

The developer has been meeting with neighborhood representatives to discuss the concerns, Planning Commission Chairman Chris Riley said, and he expects those discussions to continue.

Constellation representatives could not be reached for comment.

— Shonda Novak



More height coming to downtown

1. Fifth & Congress mixed-use tower
2. Four Seasons condo tower
3. Constellation Property Group condo project