

# ‘Bushnell South’ future beginning to take shape

Developer outlines multiyear plan for key property in Hartford



Seen from above Pulaski Circle, the building at 55 Elm St. in downtown Hartford, left foreground, soon will be converted to apartments. The property is one part of a larger redevelopment area called “Bushnell South” seen in the background. Mark Mirko/Hartford Courant



An early design shows development on a parking lot at Elm and West streets, now owned by Spinnaker Real Estate Partners. Overlooking Bushnell Park, the existing 55 Elm is in the background. Beinfield Architecture PC

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## By Kenneth R. Gosselin *Hartford Courant*

**HARTFORD** — Hartford's Bushnell South — a long envisioned redevelopment of a jumble of parking lots east of The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts — is taking shape as a developer outlines a multiyear plan for a key corner across from Bushnell Park.

Spinnaker Real Estate Partners of Norwalk expects to begin a \$63 million conversion of the historic, 1926 building at 55 Elm St. — once offices for the state attorney general and other Constitutional officers — by the end of March. Plans call for 160 apartments, co-working space and a restaurant for the structure that faces Pulaski Circle, the first phase of the development.

But a larger, master plan submitted to the city rounds out the vision for both the building and the parking lots that surround it on the northeastern corner of the Bushnell South area. The area is bisected by Capitol Avenue.

Spinnaker sees new apartment buildings with storefront space on the those parking lots, first along West Street and later along Capitol Avenue. The new buildings, both five stories high, would bring another 166 apartments to the

downtown area.

In the last decade, 2,000 apartments have been added in and around downtown, the majority in converted and sometimes, vacant and rundown office buildings. Hundreds more are planned for the near future.

Low-interest loans from the Capital Region Development Authority have figured significantly into the funding, including a \$13.5 million loan for 55 Elm. The loans are backed by state taxpayers and funded through the sale of state bonds.

But downtown apartment development is starting to enter a new phase, with new construction playing a bigger role. The massive, North Crossing — formerly DoNo — project and Bushnell South are prime examples.

In June, a CRDA unveiled a master plan for the entire Bushnell South area. The area could include more than 1,000 apartments, pedestrian promenades, shops, restaurants and entertainment venues.

And now, as the 55 Elm project gears up, CRDA, which has led planning for Bushnell South redevelopment, said it hopes to seek proposals by the end of March for one of the largest lots just east of the historic and recently renovated State Office Building at 165 Capitol Ave.

The conversion of 55 Elm is one of the first in Bushnell South, following the construction of the recently completed, publicly financed \$16 million parking garage. The garage will be used by state employees, the public and as the first step toward “district” parking for the area.

Matt Edvardson, a principal at Spinnaker and director of asset management, said the apartment conversion of the 1926 structure, which includes an annex, is expected to take about two years.

It is likely that midway or so through the conversion, a second phase along West Street will get underway. Those plans call for 81 rentals and storefront space.

Another 85 units are also planned later along Capitol Avenue, though the timing is not yet known, Edvardson said.

“The market is going to dictate how quickly we are going to be able to build these,” Edvardson said. “Some time after [the first two] buildings are delivered and leased up, we will start the project along Capitol.”

Edvardson said it is still too soon to say how much additional phases will cost. Spinnaker is likely to seek funding through CRDA and a “tax-fixing” agreement with the city.

The plans call for “green spaces” and walkways among the buildings and residential amenities such as a pool and deck.

Edvardson said the smaller annex to the larger 1926 building will also be converted to rentals, with a ground floor that may hold a destination such as a brewery, distillery, bakery or coffee roasterie.

Spinnaker, which also is developing the long-vacant corner of Park and Main streets in Hartford for apartments, said it is still bullish about building more rentals in the city.

“From what we understand, most of the comparable buildings downtown and just outside of downtown are fairly leased up and with occupancies in the mid-90s, and that’s the sign of a pretty healthy market,” Edvardson said.