

Big plans for Courtyard

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Parking problem to be solved, 19 apartments to be added

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Chapel Hill --The prospective owner of The Courtyard mixed-used development at 431 W. Franklin St. is planning a big makeover that would eliminate the property's troublesome parking problem.

The new owners also propose to add 19 apartments to go along with an eclectic mix of restaurants, retail and office spaces they hope will thrive one day at the complex.

"We're trying to bring life back to the west end of Franklin Street," said John Weigle, project manager for Durham-based The Dilweg Companies, which is expected to close on the purchase of the property Friday through its Franklin West, LLC.

Feuds With Everyone

Parking was a source of much contention at The Courtyard when the property was owned by Spencer Young, who filed for bankruptcy. Young was embroiled in a battle over parking with P.H. Craig, who contends Young never paid him for use of a portion of The Courtyard's back lot that Craig owns.

"He just never paid for any parking," Craig said. "He collected parking fees from tenants, but never turned any of the money over to me."

County tax records show the property is currently owned by NFPS, Inc., a subsidiary of Wachovia.

Fiscally Irresponsible

Meanwhile, Weigle said past problems between Young and Craig will have no bearing on any future arrangements between Craig and the new owners.

"We are eager to cooperate and work with him [Craig] to see that our needs and his needs are met," Weigle said.

Craig said he is excited about the prospect of new owners at The Courtyard and the proposed improvements.

"That's been a black cloud over the west end of Franklin," Craig said. "It's been a great improvement."

But Craig said he is also concerned the parking deck would close off his lot from Roberson Street, leaving access only from a narrow alleyway from Franklin Street that is adjacent to the Chrysler building.

"We're working on it," Craig said, noting that he and the developer have discussed the concern. "I'm optimistic [a solution to can be found]."

Olive Architecture, the Raleigh-based firm hired to design the parking deck and the other improvements, is scheduled to present concept plans tonight for the project during a public hearing at Town Hall.

The project received mostly favorable comments from members of the Community Design Commission in May.

Plans call for keeping all primary aspects of the existing buildings and making

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improvements to the courtyard. The old run-down boiler building will be replaced with a new building with ground-floor retail and 19 upper level apartments.

Most of apartments, some of which will have lofts, will overlook the courtyard. Some will have views to Franklin and Roberson streets.

The parking deck would be built on the existing parking lot. The ground level will offer convenient parking for commercial tenants while the upper levels will provide secure parking for residents.

"We are confident that the site will thrive with this new mixed use model and become a sought after destination for years to come," the developer said in a statement.

Weigle said the construction schedule depends on how quickly the project can work its way through the town's approval process, which will require a special use permit modification.
