

Plans for 5-story, \$18 million retail, NDSU housing complex unveiled

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A more contemporary skyline will soon take shape in downtown Fargo. The new focal point: an \$18 million, five-story complex on the former Lark Theater site featuring shopping and housing. Cityscapes Development unveiled the exterior plans Tuesday for the building at 630 1st Ave N, offering a sharp contrast to the neighboring historic buildings.

The design will put a contemporary spin on the historic architectural style of the existing downtown buildings, said Joel Davy of JLG Architects, which designed the building. Davy said the five-story retail and North Dakota State University housing complex will help transform First Avenue into the next: downtown destination. "What a renaissance from that funny Lark Theater sitting on stilts in a parking lot, to bring that much retail activity and that many students downtown – it'll just enhance everything that has been happening over the last couple of years since NDSU moved downtown," Davy said.



The development is being built on the site of the former Lark Theater and Cinema Grill, which has been demolished. The north facade is almost 330 feet long and has an entrance for the NDSU apartments that helps break the building into two parts, Davy said.

Developer Mike Bullinger said the facility creates an opportunity for downtown to be more than just Broadway. The mail floor will consist of approximately 40,000 square feet of retail space. Cityscapes Development has not yet signed any leasing agreements, Bullinger said. The company wants to attract a variety of retail shops including a bookstore, drug store, fitness center, fast-food restaurants and a grocery store that might sell organic foods.

Cityscapes is also talking seriously about including an upscale downtown restaurant, Bullinger said. "We would like to put in more unique things than just the standard, but it will all depend on the economy and what we're able to bring to the party." Bullinger said. "Downtown Fargo is totally different than West Acres and it needs to attract businesses that can relate t

o students and student life downtown and if we find the right mix, I think it can be accomplished."

The top four stories will contain 104 apartments and will be marketed and leased through NDSU's housing department, The apartments will be able to house about 220 students, Bullinger said.

"(Students are) very excited. They can't wait to see that option come available for them," said Michael Harwood, NDSU assistant dean of student life. "They are, I think, going to enjoy the downtown living." The student apartments include a mix of efficiencies, one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom units and will have bay windows along Roberts Street and First Avenue. The building will also have underground parking.

Fargo city commissioners have approved giving the project 10 years of payment in lieu of property tax breaks and a five-year Renaissance Zone property tax exemption to help overcome problems with the site, such as extensive rubble from "The Great Fire" of June 1893. Large underground columns must also be sunk to bedrock to stabilize the building. Project completion is scheduled for August.

