



Plans offer glimpse of proposed hotel complex in Salem

Renderings show buildings of different architectural styles

By Neil H. Dempsey
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SALEM — For a peek at developer RCG’s vision for a new, mixed-use, hotel-anchored complex at the edge of downtown, take a stroll down Washington Street past Riley Plaza and then cross the street.

There, at the corner of Dodge and Washington streets, where there are two single-story retail buildings and metered spaces out front, RCG envisions erecting the central component of its complex, a 65-foot-tall building with a hotel and retail space on the ground level.

The north building, as it’s known, will extend down Dodge Street, but its architectural style will change as it does. Farther back on Dodge Street, which will be straightened as part of the project, the building will be brick-faced; at the corner with Washington Street, next to Starbucks, it will be more modern and squarish.

In a recent project document, RCG refers to the latter section as “The Cube,” and says it will have a “civic feel” that helps the project effectively expand Salem’s downtown.

The hotel itself will have 100 to 115 rooms and a ground-floor lobby. It will likely be operated by the Maine Course Hospitality Group, though the franchise has yet to be announced. The group has previously worked with Hilton, TownePlace Suites and Courtyard by Marriott.

“Our likely hotel partner has filed for a franchise license,” said Matt Picarsic, a principal at RCG. “As soon as we find out whether they have it in hand, we’ll be able to announce the specific franchise.”

Back outside, on the ground floor under The Cube, pedestrians will be greeted by a restaurant with outdoor seating, buffered by shade trees and raised planters. The restaurant will occupy the bulk of the retail space on the building’s ground floor.

If parts of these plans seem unfamiliar, it’s probably because RCG has changed the \$50 million project’s feel considerably over the past year at the urging of the city’s Design Review Board and the Salem Redevelopment Authority.

Some of the biggest changes include moving the north building closer to Washington Street and splitting the site into different architectural styles.

“The buildings certainly look different than they did,” Picarsic said.

Another new feature will be evident just past the restaurant on Washington Street — an open-air staircase will lead between the north and west buildings to the two-layer parking structure behind them. Picarsic said the feature will allow pedestrians to park and then head downtown or to other destinations without walking all the way around the building.

“We created an open-air stair connection on the west side of the project to connect the open-air parking to the Washington Street sidewalk,” Picarsic said.

The parking structure will have roughly 250 spaces, with 38 reserved for public use. That’s the number of spaces in the half-acre lot that Dodge Area LLC — the RCG subsidiary that already owns the other acre of the project’s footprint — is working to buy from the city for \$275,000. It’s the last piece of land that needs to be acquired.

“We’re paying for the value of them, from our perspective, and on top of that agreeing to have 38 spaces that would be publicly available,” Picarsic said.

Farther down Washington Street, as it curves towards Harbor Street, the side-by-side west and south buildings will each have a different feel from the north building and will be slightly taller, at just under 70 feet. They’ll have 81 residences between them, including 10 studios, 39 one-bedrooms, 24 two-bedrooms and eight three-bedrooms. Some will have terraces overlooking Washington Street.

The south building will also feature three live/work units on the first floor, where RCG says occupants will be able to “live in one portion of the unit and see clients, perform professional services, or display artwork in another.”

RCG describes the west building as having a “contemporary approach,” with cast stone and standing seam metal. The building is set back from Washington Street, leaving room for a “generous promenade” for pedestrians. The south building will have brick detailing, with the highest two levels set back from those below it and stylistically distinct, too.

Both of those buildings will have retail space on the ground floor. The second floor in the west building also will offer space dedicated to retail and offices.

Construction could begin as early as next spring and is expected to last two years.

The plans still need approval from the city’s Planning Board. Picarsic said RCG hopes the project will be embraced and that further changes would be “minimal.”

“We think a lot of work has been put into these plans, and they represent a compelling project, so our hope would be that these plans are very well-received,” he said. “That said, it’s always difficult to predict what’s going to happen in the future, including what the demands and needs might be from users of this space, and that might dictate some possible changes.”

RCG will present its plans to the Planning Board this month, but the meeting hasn’t been scheduled yet.