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Column: The Next Big Thing

AT HOME IN OLD WAREHOUSE

LUXURY LOFTS, OTHER HOUSING WILL REFLECT 3RD WARD'S INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

DOUG SMITH, Staff Writer

The lowly warehouse will play an important role in a developer's plans to build more housing in a corner of Charlotte's Third Ward neighborhood.

Citiline Development plans to turn a rugged workhorse of a building at Hill and McNinch streets into 20 luxury lofts with soaring 20-foot ceilings. Most of the roomy units will be priced in the high \$300,000s.

The project will be the centerpiece of what could be The Next Big Thing in Third Ward: transformation of a warehouse district into an edgy residential community that respects its industrial heritage.

Citiline's Tim Crawford describes what he's doing as "district developing" - a project-by-project approach that preserves a sense of place with buildings designed to blend in.

The warehouse conversion, dubbed Warehouse 3, includes a four-story addition with four commercial storefronts, five residential flats and five two-story townhomes.

The estimated \$11 million project will be accompanied by a \$4.5 million, four-story building with 12 townhomes and 10 commercial storefront condos directly across Hill Street. They're calling that Skybox.

Each of the two projects will cover roughly a half-block in the southwest corner of Third Ward, across the Norfolk Southern railroad tracks from Bank of America Stadium.

Uptown's recent residential boom ignited a surge of housing activity in Fourth Ward, in First Ward and at the West Trade Street and South Tryon Street edges of Third Ward, but the warehouse district has gotten little notice.

Now, that's changing.

One reason is the availability of sites. Crawford said he has identified five potential project locations, at least one large vacant tract that could be developed and about 10 commercial buildings, some of which have the potential for adaptive reuse.

Amenities also are a factor.

A public park and possibly a minor-league baseball stadium are coming to Third Ward. And a pedestrian-friendly greenway will connect Third Ward and the Wesley Heights neighborhood. The Charlotte Area Transit System is considering running a streetcar through Third Ward to a planned bus-train-taxi-streetcar station on West Trade.

"This is one of those obsolete industrial areas that is just now starting to be discovered by the residential market," said Third Ward pioneer Ed Harris of Harris Associates. "When we went in, we never could have envisioned the residential density."

Harris and architect Ron Morgan bought the old Queen City Foundry complex on Cedar Street in 1987 and revived it as offices, arts studios and design showrooms.

Today, The Foundry is occupied by tenants with long-term leases, but the owners have adjoining property that someday could be developed with housing.

Longtime neighborhood leader Ginny Woolard, whose family operates Armature Winding Co. in Third Ward, supports Citiline's plans for more residential development.

"What they're doing has a little extra edge - it reflects the industrial difference," she said. "I can see how people react it's refreshing for them to see all this together, see how different it is."

Last year, Citiline developed First Row, a four-story, 84-unit condo project with a warehouse feel at First and Elliot streets in Third Ward.

Crawford said that experience convinced him to get more involved in the community as a volunteer, become a neighborhood stakeholder and develop personal relationships and partnerships there.

"He went to the neighborhood association, showed them his plans and got their feedback," Woolard said. "He has gone the extra mile to bring the neighbors into it."

The key to success in the warehouse district, Crawford said, is for developers "to be creative beyond normal" in blending contemporary and traditional architecture and weaving new construction into "the unique urban grit."

If plans jell as expected on West Morehead just across from the two projects, the area around Bank of America Stadium could be teeming with new residents in a few years.

Just outside the Third Ward boundary, developers are considering up to 400 residences on 20 acres along Morehead near Interstate 277.

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Warehouse 3

20 lofts in converted warehouse building at Hill and McNinch Streets, about one block off South Cedar Street.

Units with 20-foot ceilings range from 1,447 to 1,965 square feet with large mezzanine master suites.

Prices range from \$299,900 to the high \$300,000s.

Features include library wall systems with sliding ladders, freestanding fireplaces, high-end appliances and home offices under staircases.

Four-story annex building includes three types of units:

Four storefront commercial condos, 622 to 808 square feet, priced from \$149,900.

Five residential flats from 594 to 739 square feet, priced from \$144,900.

Five two-story residential townhomes, 1,235 to 1,554 square feet, priced from \$274,900.

What's Next?

Citiline Development plans to start Warehouse 3 construction in June and have lofts ready for occupancy about nine months later. The first step will be to demolish an old building addition that will be replaced by the new annex.

Skybox, the four-story building planned across Hill Street, will be started about the same time but probably will take a year to finish, Citiline's Tim Crawford said.

Liquid Design is the design architect and Reinhardt Architecture Inc. is the architect of record. Citiline is negotiating with Cox & Schepp Inc. to construct the buildings.

Citiline's Zoe Graham said an on-site grand opening is planned from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. today at 923 W. Hill St.

Scot Williams and Kevin Thompson of Helen Adams Realty are handling sales.
More information: www.3wwd.com

Skybox

Four-story building across Hill Street from the converted warehouse contains two types of units.

13 three-story residential townhomes, 1,144 to 1,578 square feet, priced from \$259,900.

10 commercial condo storefronts, 379 to 749 square feet, priced from \$94,900.

The building's roof decks, dubbed "skyboxes," give the building its name and provide townhome owners with skyline views. Warehouse 3

Skybox This map of the center city shows the approximate boundaries of the four wards.

Caption:

1. RENDERING COURTESY OF RISDEN MCELROY. Warehouse 3 will combine luxury lofts in a converted warehouse with a four-story annex that is to include storefront commercial condos, flats and townhomes.; 2. RENDERING COURTESY OF RISDEN MCELROY . Skybox will be a four-story building with storefront commercial condos and three-level townhomes that have rooftop "skyboxes."; 3. RENDERING COURTESY OF KEVIN MARLOW OF TM CREATIVESTAFF GRAPHIC. Warehouse 3's 20-foot-high lofts will include mezzanine master suites and library wall systems with sliding ladders.GRAPHIC:1 PHOTO:3

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