

Designed to serve as a gateway to Minneapolis from St. Paul, the West River Commons will turn a blighted section of riverfront into attractive housing and retail space.

The \$11.4 million mixed-use project, developed by The Lander Group, will comprise 53 apartments, three townhouses and 7,925 square feet of retail space. Of the apartments, 12 have been designated as affordable.

"[West River Commons] would be significant just as a project that gives an entrance into Minneapolis as people come across the river," said Randal Hemmerlin, the project's coordinator with the Minneapolis Community Development Agency. "But more than that, we like this project because it is a non-impacted (by poverty) area that will provide affordable housing. It's a redevelopment of two blighted parcels and it will have retail and commercial space on a busy corridor."

The project's East Lake Street and West River Parkway site had been occupied by a run-down 1920s church hall and vacant gas station. Petroleum deposits in the ground necessitated soil remediation and qualified the development for special grants.

However, the pollution cleanup was only one of the problems posed by the project. Michael Lander, president of The Lander Group, Minneapolis, met with neighbors more than 40 times to discuss issues such as

parking and locals' fears that the building would tower over surrounding homes.

As a result, the majority of parking will be located underground and the development will feature a broken skyline, starting at four stories on one side and falling to three at the other.

Lander said he thinks of the Commons as a model of urban housing because of its scenic setting and numerous transportation options.

In addition to its proximity to the Hiawatha Light Rail line, the development will feature an integrated, sheltered bus

NEW MIXED USE

FINALIST

West River Commons

Location, affordability bring appeal to Minneapolis "gateway"

BY SETH WOehrLE | CONTRIBUTING WRITER



Project credits

Project value: \$11.4 million

Project size: 48,787 square feet

Developer: The Lander Group Inc.

Lessor brokerage, management: @Home Apartments

Architect: DJR Architecture

General contractor: Shaw Lundquist

Finance providers: Minneapolis Community

Development Agency, LaSalle Bank, U.S. Bancorp

Piper Jaffray, Hennepin County, city of Minneapolis

stop and bike paths along the Mississippi.

The building's first signed commercial tenant is a 1,500-square-foot Dunn Bros. coffee shop. There also are plans to have a 4,500-square-foot restaurant and another business, possibly a dry cleaner or laundry.

"The Dunn Bros. coffee shop and three other (retail) tenants will be a great amenity for the neighborhood and a place for people to meet and have coffee," said Mike Cashill, president of brokerage @Home Apartments, St. Paul.

Cashill also touts the amenities of the apartments themselves: "Many units will have great views of the river. The upscale units will have hardwood floors and stainless-steel appliance packages in the kitchen."

Seth Woehrle is a free-lance writer based in Minneapolis.