

Bangert: 18 stories? Next up in WL's tall trend

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The Rise at Chauncey would be West Side's tallest and continue a taller trend near Purdue in town where limit once was three stories

When word got out this summer that the University Lutheran Church, across Chauncey Avenue from the bustle of Chauncey Hill Mall, was being eyed for the West Lafayette Village's next high rise, the developer made it no secret that the idea was to "go pretty vertical."

On the heels of what was being called West Lafayette's tallest building yet – a 10-story student apartment complex called The Hub, waiting to break ground at Wood and Pierce streets – Matt Garrison said the project his Chicago-based firm had in the works would be taller. "Hub Plus," Garrison, a principal with R2 Companies, said. What "Plus" really meant came clear Tuesday afternoon. Try 18 stories.

Details of the Rise at Chauncey, expected to open in time for Purdue's fall semester in 2019 if all goes right, surfaced Tuesday in presentations to the West Lafayette-Purdue Joint Board, a body designed to get a first look at building projects near campus as well as oversee the city and university's \$120 million remaking of State Street. With 310 units, 687 bedrooms and 20,854 square feet of retail space on the ground floor, the Rise at Chauncey would be the tallest in West Lafayette, according to Dan Teder, the attorney representing developers on the project.

"We aren't going vertical for sport," said Garrison, whose company has played a role in the construction of The Fuse, a five-story residential/retail project that opened in 2014 at 720 Northwestern Ave., across from Mackey Arena.

"We believe it's a height that makes a statement at the entrance to The Village," Garrison said. "There isn't always an environment when something like this is viable. But it is today. While the height of the building is raising the bar, this makes sense for the city, local residents, students and Purdue. This is what the State Street infrastructure investment is all about – public investment to spur market rate development."

Next up for a \$100 million project by R2 Companies and CA Ventures, a Chicago-based real estate management firm: How tall will the Federal Aviation Administration allow? Those negotiations are going on now with the Tippecanoe County Area Plan Commission. Current zoning laws allow

buildings to be 150 feet higher than the elevation of the runways at Purdue Airport, said Ryan O'Gara, assistant director of the Area Plan Commission. O'Gara said plans filed with the APC put the Rise at 191 feet, from sidewalk to rooftop. But, O'Gara said: "It's all about the site elevation."

Teder told the Joint Board members that the Rise at Chauncey, as designed so far, is about 19 feet below that 756-foot elevation threshold now. But 18 stories? In a city that just a decade ago was reluctant to think of anything taller than codes that limited heights to three stories? "You're right, that's definitely up there for us," West Lafayette Mayor John Dennis said. "For me personally, it's hard to fathom 18 stories – hard to visualize it in the Village. ..."

"But this is what we anticipated," Dennis said. "We knew when we opened the floodgates by saying, 'Let's look at what we can do to design a new West Lafayette downtown,' and then threw in the State Street project, those investors would come."

Dennis is relentless with talk about turning the Village – an area of restaurants, bars and shops a few blocks from Purdue – into the city's center. The State Street project, which aims to remake traffic patterns on and around campus by the end of 2018, has fueled that even more.

Because zoning laws still limit West Lafayette projects to three stories without negotiated designs, county planners and city officials have some say over projects looking to go taller. In this case, O'Gara said the Rise at Chauncey "contains many upper-story 'stepbacks' in its various wings to reduce the overall impact of a tall structure on its surroundings." O'Gara said the project could look different by the time it gets to the city council for final approval.

"We know we only get one shot at projects like this," said Erik Carlson, West Lafayette development director. "There's only a finite footprint of what can go along State Street. ... Everything I work on is with an eye toward, 'What are we building, and how will it look decades from now?'"

That said, when The Hub and its 10 stories came up for rezoning in October, city council members barely blinked at the size and how it would change the look and feel of the Village. Then again, city council members were told to expect more of the same in the coming months. On Tuesday, in response to questions from Joint Board members, Teder mentioned that plans were in the works for an unnamed project just east and down State Street hill from University Lutheran. And the city still expects a redevelopment of the Chauncey Hill Mall at some point. ("That's always in the mix of dreams," Dennis said.)

Carlson said the city will look to give the approach to campus, coming up State Street, a stair-stepped feel. But it should be clear by now, Carlson said, "that bigger and taller are what we're going to see." Starting with a new West Lafayette standard at 18 stories near the crest of State Street hill.

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