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CONSTRUCTION, DEVELOPMENT & DESIGN

PARABUILDINGS

Brunson Building downtown illustrates maximizing use of older structures

BY KATHY BERGSTROM ■ FOR BUSINESS FIRST

The architectural approach used to rehabilitate and expand a North High Street building could become a key downtown Columbus redevelopment trend, one architect thinks.

Jonathan Barnes, principal of Jonathan Barnes Architecture and Design, is the strategist behind the \$10 million rehabilitation and addition at the 12-story Brunson Building at 135 N. High St.

The office building, nearly a century old, is being converted into condominiums.

Barnes also is the designer of the \$2.5 million Lafayette Lofts — two stories of condos being built atop a one-story parking deck connected to the Brunson Building.

Because of the nature of the projects, both structures will become parabuildings, an architecture term Barnes said was coined by Robert Muschamp, a New York Times architecture critic, for additions that transform the character of a structure.

Parabuildings aren't new and have popped up in urban areas across the country.

Architect Stephen Yas, a partner with Chicago-based Yas/Fischel Partnership, said many projects such as the Brunson Building job are being undertaken in Chicago and there's an active movement to find ways to hide parking structures.

Complementary designs

The Brunson project fits the parabuilding definition because a 12,000-square-foot,



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Architect Jonathan Barnes sits with a model showing condominium projects the Brunson Building, left, and the Lafayette Lofts, lower back, behind the Brunson, that will sit atop a parking garage.

ANEW: 22 condos motivate expansion

12-story addition is being constructed with a modern design and not recreating the turn-of-the-century look of the building.

The Lafayette Lofts project also fits the definition because of its dual use as a parking garage and condominiums.

To Barnes, the projects are fascinating because rather than simply renovating a structure, "You have a chance to really ... recreate the image of the building," he said.

"It's also a way, I think, on a project-by-project basis, to start to update a city," Barnes said. "It's a good way to start to really change the look of a downtown area."

Yas agrees with Barnes' approach of going with a complementary design, rather than trying to replicate the structure. If you try to copy the historic building, "you are really creating Disneyland, and you're taking away from the historic structure," he said.

Barnes said he thinks the projects he is working on are necessary because of increasing urban property values and the lack of land for construction. Sometimes it's simply less expensive to build atop an existing structure than on a vacant site in a city neighborhood.

Not only are new mixed-use projects built with the garages hidden, many parking structures are strong enough to hold something built on top, Barnes said.

The projects are being developed by Long & Wilcox and are owned by Brunson Building LLC, a group that includes principals of Long & Wilcox and outside investors.

Driving profit

Barnes said he thinks more parabuildings could work in Columbus, even though its

downtown isn't as dense as other cities, and it has a lot of parking lots.

It can make more financial sense for developers to add to buildings they own, rather than trying to buy a vacant lot, he said. Parking lots provide income for their owners and aren't easily acquired.

And because the city must continue to provide parking for businesses and for new uses that will come with development, the community must find ways to make them work together.

"Housing is going to be definitely one of those uses that is going to show up over parking garages," Barnes said.

Parabuildings also can make rehabilitation projects more profitable. Without the addition, the Brunson Building's largest unit would have been about 1,400 square feet. With the addition, the smallest units are 1,400 square feet and the largest, 3,400 square feet.

Bob Long, president of Long & Wilcox, said, "What it really means for us is we can sell 1,500-square-foot units that have substantially more glass than if you were in a more traditional building."

The Brunson Building's features also include 14-foot-high ceilings in the lobby, marble columns and an iron-railed marble staircase. Long said he thinks it has some characteristics not found in newer buildings.

Developers spent a long time figuring how to comply with fire safety requirements but were told late in the project by the city that the building would require a second stairwell, Long said.

"At that point, because of the cost of doing that, we were looking at ways to make this more profitable," he said. "That's when the idea of an expansion came into play."

Brunson Building condos start at \$340,000 and rise to more than \$1 million. Long said eight have been sold so far.

The project "was tremendously complicated, and when it's all complete, I think it's really going to be a landmark for downtown Columbus," he said. "When this is done, this will be our marque project."

The building will include more than 5,000 square feet of first-floor retail space with 22 condos on the upper stories. Lambert Optical will occupy part of the retail area. The addition is a modern steel structure with a glass-and-aluminum exterior;



RENDERING COURTESY JONATHAN BARNES ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

Condos priced from \$340,000 to \$1 million will be the result when 22,000 square feet and 12 stories are attached onto the Brunson Building.

the existing structure is a masonry building.

To create a visual relationship between the buildings, horizontal spandrels — the spaces between the windows in each structure — will be lined up. In the existing building, the spandrels are made of brick and in the addition they are opaque glass in shades of gray.

Once developers decided to build a one-story parking garage behind the building, it made sense to consider what could be done above that deck, Barnes said.

The owners decided to build two floors of condos above that structure, also. It made sense to add the condos because they covered the parking on the top level and gave the company a chance to offer units at a lower prices, Long said.

Lafayette Lofts - built with metal, glass and stucco - will cost \$230,000 to \$270,000 each and encompass about 1,170 square feet.

The Brunson should be finished this summer and the 12-unit Lafayette project later in the year.

Barnes is working on a similar project, but of a smaller scale, with the renovation of the Ohio Furniture Building at 139 E. Main St. That building is being converted into 11 condos.

