

Real Estate Buzz: No flippers allowed



Real Estate
Buzz
By
Marc Stiles

At Fifteen Twenty-One — the new name of what would be Seattle's tallest residential high-rise — they're just saying no to investors. If you want to buy a condo, you'll have to live in the building at 1521 Second Ave., just east of Pike Place Market.

The condos are one of several developments in that area. Something finally could be happening next door at the forlorn Second & Pike Building, now mostly vacant except for some retail and the health department's needle exchange program. More on that in a moment.

Flipping fever is gripping downtown projects in Las Vegas, San Diego and Vancouver, B.C. Investors in all three cities are estimated to make up half of the condo buyers, in hopes of selling or renting them for tidy profits.

"We haven't had that kind of fever here," says **William Justen**, managing director of the Samis Land Co., which is developing Fifteen Twenty-One with Opus Northwest.

Justen hopes to keep it that way for two reasons. He wants to test the market and says it's not a true test if investors are competing against prospective homeowners. And he wants to guard the character of the 36-story project, whose height hinges on the City Council approving a significant increase in downtown building height limits.

Residents making what most likely is the largest personal investments of their lives tend to care more about the neighborhood than renters and investors. Justen says that's

important for any community but particularly in one that's home to a treasure like Pike Place Market.

The flipper-free concept seems to be working. Justen says Windermere OnSite has non-binding reservations for about two-thirds of the 143 condos in the tower that Weber + Thompson is designing.

The number of units is down from the 250 announced earlier this year, due in part to increasing the size of some units, according to Justen. Prices haven't been determined yet.

The reservation count is impressive given the complex project and the current condition of the neighborhood.

Besides waiting for the City Council to decide on the height issue, there's the monorail. Samis and Opus have an agreement with the monorail agency to put a station in the building, and now await the results of the fifth monorail vote next month.

Finally, there's the needle exchange on the first floor of the Second & Pike Building, next door to Fifteen Twenty-One. Unlike the monorail, this is something Samis and Opus can do something about.

"Pike should be one of the absolutely best pedestrian experiences in the city.. It is far short of that," says Justen, who is working with longtime Second & Pike owner **Richard Nimmer** to redevelop the building. Nimmer doesn't want to sell but has been unable to do anything with his property. Opus and Justen are there with an offer of aid.

"We've proposed we'll take the risk off his shoulders," says Justen. "We're real close."