

## Developer for downtown project chosen

By MATT OLBERDING / Lincoln Journal Star

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If things go as planned, the Lincoln skyline could undergo a major transformation by the end of the decade.

Mayor Coleen Seng announced Wednesday that she has chosen the Lincoln Synergy Group's proposed \$180 million redevelopment project for the block bounded by P, Q, 13th & 14th streets.

The proposal includes a 22-story tower with a parking garage, hotel, apartment condominiums and office and retail space on the southwest corner of the intersection. It also features an 18-story tower across the street on the northwest corner of 14th and Q streets that would house a garage, retirement housing units, space for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and retail space.

"We call this the Catalyst Project because it will spur more development downtown," Seng said. "This major investment will change our skyline and result in even more economic development in our city core."

Monte Froehlich of Lincoln Synergy Group agreed. "I'm thrilled to see what the impact could be on Lincoln," he said.

Froehlich said few details have been worked out. The hotel developer has not yet picked a brand, he said. And although



interest has been expressed in about 85,000 square feet of the project's office space, no agreements have been signed.

And, he said, he has had only preliminary discussions with property owners who would have to move to make way for the retirement complex.

Developers also must work out many details with the city, including how much tax-increment financing would be possible.

Once that is done and a redevelopment agreement has been negotiated, the project will need the blessing of the City Council.

So, Froehlich didn't want to speculate on a timeline for the project. He did say, however, that construction of what would be Lincoln's second- and fourth-tallest buildings likely would take 18 to 24 months.

And Froehlich said his team is committed to building both at the same time. "Our approach is going

to be to tie both together," he said.

For those who might question whether a retirement center in downtown Lincoln is viable, know this: The university has done its homework.

Ed Paquette, executive director of the Nebraska Alumni Association, said the university started talking about the concept more than seven years ago.

Focus groups and independent surveys showed a lot of interest in having such housing on or near campus, he said. And there are more than 50 similar projects around the country, showing that the concept really works, Paquette said. "I'm very excited about the opportunity," he said.

The Lincoln Synergy Group proposal was recommended by an 11-member advisory committee over a competing proposal from Dial Realty Corp. of Omaha. That \$45 million proposal included a 13-story building with parking for 600 cars, a 112-room Residence Inn by Marriott, 14 condominiums, a sports bar, entertainment complex and a smaller building with office and retail space.

Missouri hotel developer John Q. Hammons also had submitted a bid, but he withdrew it two weeks ago, saying he wants to focus his energy on the proposed arena and hotel/convention center in the Haymarket.