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Several new projects helping fuel downtown high-rise enthusiasm

BY TONY ILLIA

Downtown Las Vegas is bristling with renewed energy, excitement and enthusiasm. Projects are sprouting up like dandelions through sidewalk cracks as investment dollars make the area vital and relevant once again.

Soho Lofts, for example, opened last year at Las Vegas Boulevard and Hoover Avenue. The \$67 million, 17-story high-rise is downtown's first luxury residential tower. The 120-unit Soho Lofts quickly sold out. Today, there are 14,392 units worth of luxury condo projects proposed or planned downtown, reports Applied Analysis, a Las Vegas-based business advisory firm.

"Downtown is definitely coming into its own," said Paul Murad, a high-rise specialist and president of Metroplex Development Group. "Once the projects now under construction come on line, it will boost the next phase of development."

There are 784 units under construction in downtown, including Barclays North's \$107 million, 275-unit Streamline Tower at Ogden Avenue and Las Vegas Boulevard and CityMark Development's \$167 million, 341-unit Juhl at 255 E. Bonnevillle Ave. Both projects are expected to finish in 2008. Soho Lofts developer Sam Cherry, meanwhile, is putting finishing touches on his Newport Lofts. The \$93 million, 168-unit high-rise at Casino Center Boulevard and Hoover Avenue will open in September.

Cherry is planning a third downtown high-rise called Stanhai. The \$207 million, 425-unit tower at Gass Avenue and Third Street should break ground later this summer. Breslin Builders is the general contractor. The 45-story skyscraper is scheduled to finish in early 2010.

Meanwhile, preselling has begun on 825-units worth of luxury downtown residences, including the \$135 million, 296-unit Verge at Main Street and Bonanza Road. The nine-story, 350,000-square-foot project is expected to

debut in 2008. It will be joined by the \$14 million, 78-unit ArtHaus at Casino Center Drive and Charleston Boulevard. The four-story, 132,000-square-foot building is scheduled to break ground in December. San Diego-based Blokhaus is developer.

"High-density projects continue to sell but at a more measured and sustainable pace because of their scale and amenity offerings," said [John Restrepo](#), principal of [Restrepo Consulting Group](#), a Las Vegas-based economic research firm. "The velocity of reservations and sales contracts have dropped compared to activity in 2004 and 2005."

Indeed, 1,478 units worth of luxury projects have been suspended with another 398 units canceled. Notable additions to the list of canceled projects include the 35-story, 398-unit Sandhurst tower at Iron Horse Court and Grand Central Parkway; and the 60-story, 800-unit Club Renaissance at Bonneville Avenue and Casino Center Boulevard. Rising construction costs, financing and sluggish sales were cited as reasons for pulling the plug.

Other dormant downtown projects are Eddie Haddad's 38-story, 270-unit H.U.E. Lofts at Arts Central at Charleston and Casino Center boulevards; Boulevard Properties' 29-story, 159-unit Evolution Lofts at Charleston Boulevard and Third Street; and Northwest Resource's 27-story, 414-unit Cielo Vista at Washington Avenue and Veterans Memorial Drive. Despite this, downtown still accounts for 19 percent of the valley's total luxury condo market.

"While it would have been an unreasonable expectation to believe that all of the projects in the development pipeline would enter the market as planned, it would be equally questionable to conclude that resort and residential condominiums are a passing fad," said Brian Gordon, principal of Applied Analysis. "The luxury condominium market continues to evolve and respond to the latest market conditions."

tonyillia@aol.com