



Business

Developers plan class, commitment to Perry Lane Hotel project on Drayton

By Katie Nussbaum

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There is no better place to see the influx of development in Savannah than the few Drayton Street blocks between Liberty Street and Oglethorpe Avenue.

Plans for the short corridor include a new Colony Bank branch, West Elm furniture store and the biggest of the projects, an excavated pit that encompasses two city blocks, which will be home to the Perry Lane Hotel.

“We have embraced the talk of Savannah vs. Charleston and we explored Charleston quite a bit, as well and we actually are believers in Savannah. We don’t think they’re parallel places, we think Savannah is a better place,” said Jon Kully, managing partner and co-founder of Flank, the company responsible for the planned high-end, boutique hotel.

“The quality of architecture is exceptional, but perhaps most importantly the cast of characters in this town make a far more interesting place.”

Flank first made a name for itself in Savannah in 2011, purchasing interest in and developing the historic Drayton Tower building on Liberty Street into almost 100 residential units along with ground floor retail space.

“That was successful project number one,” Kully said.

“We converted Drayton Towers, which was once an eyesore situation into a very vibrant community... We’re thrilled to be a part of the second chapter, which is the Perry Lane Hotel behind (Drayton Tower).”

The two-building hotel will sit directly behind Drayton Tower in what was once two empty lots used for parking for Parker’s Market and tower residents. Kully said the company tossed around numerous ideas of what to do with the lots before settling on a hotel.

“We settled on a luxury hotel because we thought, when you think about Charleston, when you think about Savannah, the single hole in this marketplace is a truly luxurious, complete authentic hotel and we wanted to fill that void,” he said.

While many of the New York-based company’s projects have been in Manhattan and Brooklyn, they’ve also taken place in landmark districts and Kully said that experience and skillset of navigating a landmark’s process is very translatable approach from other cities to Savannah.

“I think the approach with humility helps, because we’re not asking for an inappropriate 15-story building in a four-story district,” Kully said.

“And a lot of other developers don’t have that integrated design sensibility and respect for the environment.”

Project manager, Brian Walsdorf, said the project garnered a lot of attention with the Historic Review Board, but overall the results were positive. The board approved the project last August after the Zoning Board of Appeals granted height variances for the two buildings. The north building at its highest point is 72 feet high and the south building at its highest point is 76 feet high.

“I think everybody is pleased on all sides,” Walsdorf said.

Kull and Walsdorf said the company strived to engage with surrounding neighbors from the early stages of project, including construction surveys to ensure open communication with those living and working around the construction site.

“It maybe seems obvious, but I don’t think it’s necessarily the practice (of other companies),” Kully said.

While there have been a few issues - two neighboring business owners filed complaints last month that the construction had caused cracks in their buildings’ walls - Kully said as someone who also operates a business near the site (Drayton Tower) that the construction can be frustrating the team is working to move through it as quickly as possible with the least amount of obstruction.

“The longsighted approach is that everyone has value creation, the community becomes more vibrant and more and more concentration of local businesses are opening,” he said. “All good things.”

The hotel will feature 168 guest rooms, a pool, meeting spaces, a rooftop events space and retail and dining options, but it won’t be cookie-cutter, according to the Flank team.

“It’s a lot of vibrancy and sophistication without some of the hoopla that transpires elsewhere in town,” Kully said of the hotel’s interior and exterior elements.

“It’s just a bit more of a foodie, high-end retail experience... The kind of real attributes of Savannah.”

The location outside of the business of Broughton and Bay Streets also plays into the desire to provide more for locals while giving tourists the authentic Savannah neighborhood experience. And Walsdorf said the team is already working to establish relationships with local farmers, butchers, retailers and artists, including Art Rise Savannah.

“We’re really trying to connect with the local market,” he said.

The hotel’s streetscape and entrances will give off the feel of an airy, southern front porch and the lobby will be reminiscent of a parlor you might find in a Savannah manor complete with attendants with bar-carts who will create a custom cocktail for guests and the hotel will feature a more causal, neighborhood-type bar.

Other design details will include lush greenery, grand fireplaces and antiques collected and curated from local shops. The retail aspects will also be curated just like the art, according to Walsdorf, who said they open to create a sort of local exchange for area merchants.

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“We have made it all approachable, so that downtown families, downtown couples can go and frequent these establishments very often, so it’s not too high-brow or too high out of reach, but I think they’ll find the many offerings very special and different,” Kully said.

Local connections, commitment

Flank is also extending its commitment to the local community by working with more than a dozen local subcontractors and designers for the project, including Hansen Architects, who designed the hotel. DPR Construction is overseeing construction and, depending on the phase, the project will create 90 to 200 construction jobs and once the hotel opens it will employ around 200 people, most of which will be on a higher pay scale than similar hospitality jobs, according to Kully.

The excavated hole is 17 feet deep with a 42,000 square-foot footprint and construction has been moving along as scheduled, according to DPR officials.

The next step in construction is pouring the foundation - which will begin in the next few weeks - topping out the concrete structure in January, completing the facade in May and interiors in September 2017. The hotel should be open for business late in the fourth quarter of 2017.

While other projects along the street could affect traffic flow, Flank is working with the City of Savannah to complete final connections and hope that the lane closure associated with hotel construction will only last a few more weeks.

“(Flink) is very hands-on, unlike a lot of the other clients we work with. There’s a really tight relationship here and they’re really involved the entire process,” said Darryl Strunk of DPR.

“They’re invested in the project as much as we are if not more and being here to keep things running smooth is a big help for us.”

Kully said building those relationships, whether they be with food vendors, construction crew or residents are what makes Flink stand apart from other development firms.

“Everyone, all components of the team, are here to stay,” he said.



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