

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

March 20, 2019

'Signature tower' in the works at the former Papa J's Centro site Downtown

By Mark Belko



Michael M. Santiago/Post-Gazette

From a former brothel to a “signature tower” — it could happen on a prime piece of Downtown real estate.

For the first time, a representative of the Troiani family is talking about a potential vision for the collection of properties it owns on the Boulevard of the Allies and Market Street, including the soon-to-be-demolished former Tramps and Papa J's Centro restaurant and an adjacent structure.

Michael Troiani said the family is considering a mixed use development — a “signature tower”

as he put it — with an office anchor, first floor retail, and “as much housing as we can squeeze in.”

In the past, Mr. Troiani has said only that the family was looking at creating an “integrated community development” on the tract, which also includes the former Froggy's nightspot and two adjacent properties on Market Street.

Although Mr. Troiani said it's “a little premature” to discuss a height, the new building would be tall enough to light up the city's skyline.

“We're looking for that right office anchor that wants to have their

name on the city skyline,” he said.

Under city zoning laws, a tower of up to 20 to 25 stories may be possible at the site.

A few blocks over on Fifth Avenue in the same general part of the Golden Triangle, Three PNC Plaza, which houses the Reed Smith law firm and the Fairmont Hotel, is 23 stories.

Mr. Troiani made his comments after meeting with the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation about the project and the fate of Froggy's and the other Market Street buildings.

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While the Troianis are inclined to take down those buildings to assemble land for the mixed use development, the foundation is opposed to demolishing them. It believes the buildings can be saved and reused.

Those structures — as well as the two on the Boulevard of the Allies to be demolished — are part of or are on the border of the Firstside Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The honor doesn't protect them from being torn down.

Arthur Ziegler, Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation president, described Tuesday's meeting as "quite cordial." While the Troianis did not back off the idea of razing the buildings, they agreed to

share information and to continue discussions with the foundation about the properties.

"I think there are a lot of ways our interests align," Mr. Troiani said. "I think it's going to work out. We're going to figure out some ways to make some positive things happen."

The two sides, Mr. Ziegler said, will look at whether the old Froggy's building and the others on Market can be incorporated in whole or in part in any new development.

"They think not. Nevertheless, we will look at it," he said.

Nonetheless, the two sides have promised to meet again and will "try to work to educate one another and find solutions," Mr. Ziegler said.

Foundation representatives also

would like to be kept in the loop on the design of the "signature tower" proposed at the site.

"If a new building is going in, if old buildings are going to be sacrificed partially or wholly, we want to make sure there's a good modern building in its place," Mr. Ziegler said.

Demolition is now "moments away," with just a few details to be ironed out, said Ken Doyno, principal in the Rothschild Doyno Collaborative, the architect for the project.

The buildings have a colorful history, one that reportedly included a stop on the Underground Railroad, followed by a second life as a brothel, and a third as a restaurant — first Tramps and then Papa J's.