

The basilica's big idea

City staff are working up a preliminary agreement with the McKibbon Group for a seven-story hotel on Haywood Street. But the Basilica of St. Lawrence has some ideas of its own for the city-owned property across the street from the historic downtown church.



A modest proposal: This alternate vision for the city-owned parcel on Haywood Street includes a public plaza and an eight-story hotel. Designed by MMM Development on behalf of the Basilica of St. Lawrence, the conceptual drawing doesn't strictly follow property boundaries. Artist's rendering courtesy Matt Mores

On June 4, **Matt Mores** of MMM Development submitted an alternative plan to the city that he hopes will showcase the advantages of creating a public plaza on a portion of the site. Mores, a basilica parishioner, is working with the church on the project.

The conceptual design depicts an eight-story hotel wrapped around the open space. The hotel (including a four-story annex) is sited on the footprint of two existing city-owned structures (a parking deck and the former site of the Flying Frog Café). The plaza would occupy what's now surface parking, serving as a gateway to that part of downtown, Mores explains.

The basilica, says Mores, would prefer to have the entire parcel left open, but it prefers his design to the one proposed by McKibbon, which it fears would overshadow the church. The McKibbon proposal has already drawn flak from local activist groups. McKibbon, meanwhile, released a statement June 5 defending its design and noting that it will probably evolve as the project moves forward. That proposal would still have to clear several major hurdles before ground could be broken.

Mores says the hotel depicted in his own conceptual rendering is intended to complement the adjacent Grove Arcade while preserving the sightline between the arcade and the basilica. He also stresses that MMM Development isn't interested in building the project, citing the current slump in the local hotel market. Instead, he hopes that both City Council and McKibbon will see the potential for a different approach.

“We have nothing against McKibbon,” says Mores. “The basilica wants to embrace McKibbon and hopes they can build a project that shows good balance.” And, he adds, because the original RFP included a parking element that is no longer included in McKibbon’s design, the city should reopen the process.

This isn’t the first time MMM Development has submitted proposals for the site. The company submitted materials during the city’s initial request for qualifications but didn’t make the short list, according to **Sam Powers**, the city’s economic development director. Of the nine companies that did make the cut, only McKibbon followed up with an actual proposal. At press time, there’d been no response from the city concerning Mores’ proposed design.