

Tower in the works for River Walk

Plans call for upscale Thompson Hotels, condos at location near Tobin Center

By **Richard Webner**

STAFF WRITER

Developers are in talks with city officials about building a 21-story hotel and condo tower on the River Walk that would include the first Texas location of the upscale Thompson Hotels chain.

Houston-based Powers Brown Architecture has submitted plans for a tower on a 0.66-acre vacant lot at 101 Lexington Ave. across from the

Tobin Center for the Performing Arts. The tower is the latest bit of good news for the city's effort to build up downtown — another developer revealed plans last month for a 30-story apartment tower on the River Walk.

The building also would be a win for the northern part of downtown, which livened up after the Tobin Center opened in 2014 but remains marred by large swaths of parking lots.

"Done well, it could be great for responding to the success of

the Tobin Center and could help to provide some great options for that area," said District 1 Councilman Roberto Treviño, whose district would include the tower.

The tower, which is scheduled to be reviewed at the March 16 meeting of the Historic and Design Review Commission, is being developed by a group that includes Roberto Contreras, CEO and president of Houston EB5, a limited-liability corporation that helps for-

ExpressNews.com



Past coverage: Read about other upcoming downtown developments.

eign investors gain permanent residency in the U.S. in exchange for making investments in the Houston real estate market. Houston EB5 is currently developing several condo skyscrapers in Houston.

"This is our first step in what is going to be a significant development to the Arts District," the development group, Thompson San Antonio Investors

Tower continues on B5



San Antonio Express-News

TOWER

From page B1

Group LLC, said in an email.

Under the current design, the tower will have 167 hotel rooms, 61 condos, a spa, a rooftop bar, a 3,600-square-foot ballroom, a restaurant on the street level and an outdoor pool on the fifth or sixth floor overlooking the River Walk, said Jeffrey Brown, a founding partner of Powers Brown.

The tower is "good news for the urban core. We welcome more residential living," said Pat DiGiovanni, CEO and president of Centro San Antonio. "The big question is supply and demand of hotel rooms ... I'm not sure of the need for more hotels, but that's

not to say it's not warranted."

Developers declined to provide renderings of the tower before it's considered by the HDRC, but Brown said its street-level facade will include stone and lead-coated copper to blend in with local architectural styles, while the upper floors would feature a "limestone-like" material.

Some River Walk developments have been opposed by locals concerned that they will cast shadows over the river, but the tower's designers are "making sure we don't have a canyon effect," Brown said.

Thompson Hotels is an international chain with 10 hotels, including three in New York City, two in Mexico and others in London, Toronto, Chica-

go, Miami Beach and Seattle, according to its website.

Powers Brown, which also has offices in Denver and in the Washington, D.C., area, has taken the lead in designing major projects in Houston recently, including two condo towers: the 24-story Ivy Lofts east of downtown and the 33-story Arabella near The Galleria, which is being developed by Houston EB5.

City officials have struggled to achieve the goals of the Decade of Downtown initiative that former Mayor Julián Castro launched in 2010 to attract development into San Antonio's urban center. But officials have had a lot to celebrate in the last year.

Dallas-based JMJ Development announced

plans in February to build a 30-story luxury apartment tower on the River Walk close to the Tower Life Building, and the HDRC gave conditional approval for a 24-story boutique Hilton hotel on Commerce Street along the River Walk. In January, the city unveiled the snazzy \$325 million expansion of the Convention Center.

In December, H-E-B opened downtown's first full-fledged grocery store in decades on South Flores Street. And in June, City Council approved a deal between the city, Weston Urban and Frost Bank that will lead to downtown's first new office tower in more than 25 years.

rwebner@express-news.net
@rwebner