

Approval for 1350 Main Condo

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A proposed 16-story luxury condominium tower at the western end of Main Street won approval from the City Commission on Monday, despite protests from neighboring residents and business owners.

The tower, facing Sarasota Bay at the corner of Main and Gulf Stream Avenue, is to include 15 condos -- most with prices of more than \$2.7 million -- and parking space for 30 cars.

But unlike many other developments going up downtown, developer Sam Hamad's project will not include retail shops on the ground floor.

That absence, along with concerns about traffic and the small number of units in the tower, prompted objections from nearby residents and shop owners.

"I think it's not a good project for that location," said Kenny Barr, owner of the Sports Page Bar & Grille next door to the project on Main. "We need the retail."

The condominium tower will replace Pinto's Primi Piatti restaurant and Robinson Spry Interiors at the end of Main. Both have found new homes elsewhere.

Under the new downtown code the city adopted last May, those stores should be replaced with more retail space. The code requires that new developments on Main have ground-floor retail establishments.

But because Hamad filed his plans for the condo tower last April, city officials say he doesn't have to follow the new rules.

Hamad's project also prompted criticism because it takes advantage of the city's new downtown overlay district, which is designed to attract more residential buildings in the core downtown area.

The policy gives developers permission to build extra condo units as long as they contribute to affordable housing and transit trust funds.

For example, the 17-story 1350 Main St. condominium complex will use the "density bonus" to build 134 condos one block east of Hamad's project.

In Hamad's case, the bonus lets him build 15 condos instead of seven. But a dozen of those condos are three-bedroom units that will occupy one floor of the tower and are to sell for more than \$2.7 million.

Vice Mayor Mary Anne Servian echoed the concerns of some residents when she said those luxury units were not the kind of residences the commission was trying to attract with the density bonus.

"My intention ... was to try to get additional smaller units," said Servian, the only commissioner to vote against the project.

Andrew Foley, who lives across the street from the proposed development, also objected to the high prices of the condos, saying density should be used to build more moderately priced homes.

"The added density in this particular case is being used to create larger units," Foley said.

But most of the commissioners said they were glad to have a project bring more residences downtown.

"On balance, although I'm not happy with everything this project is going to do, I think it's appropriate to approve it," Commission Lou Ann Palmer said.

In exchange for the extra units, Hamad and his business partner will have to contribute \$20,000 to the a city-wide affordable housing trust fund and \$8,000 to the transit fund.

They have also offered to redesign the median on Gulf Stream Avenue and build about 23 more public parking spaces.