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Developers bank on healthy living in Aventura

BY NICHOLAS NEHAMAS - NNEHAMAS@MIAMIHERALD.COM

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A rendering of the planned development at Aventura ParkSquare. ZYSCOVICH ARCHITECTS

Developers in South Florida have offered car elevators, indoor ice skating rinks, 24-hour concierge service and other luxury amenities to entice residents into their gleaming new buildings.

But a planned, mixed-use project near the Aventura Mall promises something simpler: healthy living.

“An active lifestyle is an attraction,” said Bernard Zyscovich, architect for the \$200 million development, which is called Aventura ParkSquare.

Zyscovich said he wants residents and visitors to use their legs instead of driving a car or sheltering in the cool safety of air conditioning.

With that in mind, he plans to design the nearly 7.5-acre project around spacious sidewalks shielded from the heat and rain by a canopy of protective landscaping. The walkways will be built without curbs to encourage joggers and people with strollers, walkers and wheelchairs to roam free.

The development will include a residential tower with 131 units, a Class-A office building, several restaurants and retail shops, a senior living facility, a hotel, a public park and a small medical office building.

The units range from between 1,000 and 1,800 square feet and will sell for between \$400,000 and \$800,000.

“We want people walking from location to location,” said Victor Ballestas, principal at Integra Investments, which also developed Chase Bank Building in downtown Miami. “Ultimately, walkability is good for business.”

It’s is also good for public health, said Dr. Karen Lee, a former official at the New York City Department of Health and a consultant (<http://www.drkarenlee.com/>) who specializes in using architecture and urban planning to promote public health, a discipline called “active design.”

“There’s now a strong base of evidence that when you design physical activity into your buildings and streets and neighborhoods, it can increase people’s physical activity,” said Lee, who is not affiliated with the project. “Given that our current epidemics are obesity and diabetes, creating healthy streets and neighborhoods can be an incredible tool for improving public health.”

Zyscovich said the residential property will also have fitness studios, a roof-top pool and an urban garden where residents can grow their own vegetables.

Buildings will be equipped with wide stairwells illuminated by natural light. “We want people to have the option of walking comfortably instead of taking the elevator,” Zyscovich said.

The Aventura development isn’t the first health-oriented community created in Miami-Dade. In 2011, the Canyon Ranch Hotel & Spa launched a 207-unit condominium venture in Miami Beach at 6801 Collins Ave.

That complex was recently sold

(<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/business/article6339276.html>) to new investors in a bankruptcy auction and will revert to its original name, the Carillon Hotel & Spa.

Developers at Aventura ParkSquare expect to break ground during the first quarter of this year, with a completion date of early 2017. Integra and two investor groups have so far raised \$30 million in cash, Ballestas said. They plan to finance construction with a conventional bank loan.

The group expect to see a new kind of Aventura resident moving in.

“People have always seen the city of Aventura as home to an older age demographic,” said Ivan Ramirez, the project’s director of sales. “But what we are seeing now is a much younger Aventura, with younger professionals and families with young children moving in.”

The city’s median age fell from 52.8 to 46.6 between 2000 and 2013, according to the latest numbers available from the U.S. Census.

Aventura’s mayor, Enid Weisman, said the development will benefit her community. “This is not just another set of very tall buildings,” she said. “We’re getting a lot of greenery, a lot of great design, a mixture of everything you would want located in one place.”