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# Hotels in, tax abatements out, and more property on the block at Cleveland Heights' Top of the Hill (Corrected version)



By [Thomas Jewell, special to cleveland.com](#)

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**(CORRECTION:** *This is a corrected version of the original story, where there was confusion between "tax abatements, which are "off the table" at this point, and "Tax Increment Financing," which both developers say will likely be needed. But since the project is still conceptual in nature, those "TIF" amounts have not been determined.*)

CLEVELAND HEIGHTS, Ohio -- Both developers vying for the city-owned Top of the Hill property now have hotels on their drawing boards, while tax abatements are now "off the table."

Additional privately-held properties, including the Fifth Third Bank branch at the corner of Lennox and Cedar Roads, along with the commercial building next to Nighttown, may be on the sale block too, City Council learned Monday (Sept. 12).

As the **top two selections** out of six original proposals, the plans put forward by Cleveland-based Fairmount Properties, along with Flaherty & Collins of Indianapolis remain flexible during the city's "due diligence" process in choosing a developer.

Mayor Cheryl Stephens said the process could continue through the end of the year, although she would "love to have everything wrapped up so we can start construction next spring."

Meanwhile, Flaherty & Collins has "warmed up to the idea of hotels" on the 4-acre site, wedged between Cedar Road and Euclid Heights Boulevard at the city's western gateway, adding one to the mix in their proposed \$75-\$85 million investment.

Fairmount Properties originally presented a smaller "boutique hotel" with 55-80 rooms, although a full-sized, 120-room, nationally branded hotel is now also being considered.

"Since the last meeting (with council in July), the idea of a hotel has shown financial viability," Silverlode consultant Dennis McAndrew told council.

On Sept. 6, council voted to extend Silverlode's contract by another \$25,000, as the previous "up-to-\$50,000" agreement was accruing.

With Councilman Kahlil Seren dissenting in the 5-1 vote -- primarily because of the short notice on the legislation last week -- City Manager Tanisha Briley assured council that the money would be recouped once the city sold the property.

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Briley said Monday that the city may not be interested in owning any more parking decks, a big feature in both proposals.

"I would prefer that they (the developers) own and manage it for us," Briley added. "And we want them to fill any unmet parking needs as well as their own."

City officials like ideas such as having the proposed parking deck "disguised" by some wrap-around Mews-style townhomes that Fairmount Properties has suggested.

"We have the 'Heights' advantage -- the views anticipated from any development will be fantastic." - Kara O'Donnell

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At the same time, Flaherty & Collins is now partnering with another one of the **original six candidates**, Liberty Development Co. of Lakewood on putting together some of the for-sale properties that Stephens is pushing for.

Responding to a question from Councilwoman Carol Roe about the possibility of tax abatements that came up earlier, Stephens said 15-year, 100 percent exemptions originally mentioned are now off with table with both developers.

Briley said Wednesday (Sept. 14) that while tax abatements have been scrapped, both teams have noted the need for Tax Increment Financing, which is a different economic tool.

"Since both projects are conceptual in nature and we are very early on in the developer selection process, the amount of TIF is not known," Briley added.

As for expanding the scope of the project, one of the developers' representatives said Monday that a "letter of intent to purchase" had been signed by the owners of the building housing CL Barber Salon and Zoss the Swiss Baker.

That can mean that negotiations are ongoing, and discussions are also under way for the Fifth Third Bank property.

There is also some city-owned land on the south side of Cedar Road, where some townhomes are being mentioned.

One building that isn't going anywhere seems to be the Buckingham Condominiums, with residents turning out for Monday's meeting to see what they can expect.

Rev. Don King said he would like to see the height of the development capped at well under 10 stories so that the Buckingham doesn't get swallowed up, "robbing the beauty of the top of Cedar Hill by overpowering it with buildings."

Buckingham resident Laura Hengehold also likes the idea of masking the parking decks, but is concerned about looking out and seeing loading docks and trash receptacles on the new development, as well as additional lighting and fewer parking spaces for the elderly and disabled.

Fellow resident Fran Burk said she wants to see the neighborhood "retain its character and charm," including the Tudor-style architecture.

"Even the [street signs](#) have it," Burk pointed out.

McAndrew noted that "one of the main criteria in choosing these companies was the city's goal to find a developer that works with the community."

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