

# West Sacramento rising

## Project would change skyline, image

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West Sacramento city planners have long dreamed of constructing a large-scale commercial corridor, connecting to Sacramento's central business district. In the 1990s, the dream expanded to include people living, working and playing along West Sacramento's waterfront.

Now, a plan to build a six-building complex of mid-and high-rise office and residential towers across the river from Old Sacramento brings that vision closer to reality.

The project has yet to be approved by the city's Planning Commission or council, but it appears to have strong backing, and construction could begin in 2007.

The Raley's Landing complex would radically reshape Sacramento's skyline, extend downtown across the river and give added prestige to the capital city's western neighbor.

West Sacramento boosters are feeling as optimistic as they did when the first pitch was thrown at Raley Field in 2000 for the Triple-A River Cats. They predict this latest high-profile development will open people's eyes to the fast-growing, former blue-collar town.

"It's going to be a stigma-buster and set the groundwork for future development in the area," said Bryan Turner, a West Sacramento developer not involved in the project. "That project is really just one more project to add to the West Sacramento renaissance ... that will forever change the way the rest of the region views West Sacramento."

Just a few years back, the Raley's Landing proposal might have been viewed with heavy skepticism. But now the project - both complementing and righting the errors of the ziggurat office building - is the next logical step for booming West Sacramento, city officials and developers say.

In addition to the proposed office and residential towers by Sacramento's Panattoni Development Co., the project includes several six-story condominiums and apartments, with ground-level restaurants and shops, and on-site parking. A hotel and conference center also is under consideration.

City officials and outside developers said an anchor tenant for the tallest structure of the complex - a 19-story office building - has been identified and will help ensure the project's success. City officials have refused to name the tenant or who might operate the hotel until the project's backers are ready to announce their roles.

A Panattoni official also declined to discuss the project.

The proposed development, on land owned by grocery chain Raley's Inc. and the Teel Family Trust, adds to a growing list of major projects planned for the Sacramento skyline.

Twin 53-story condominium towers were approved by the city of Sacramento over the summer, and a 25-story office tower and 38-story residential tower have been proposed.

While not as tall as some as of the buildings being planned for Sacramento, the West Sacramento project would be the largest expansion of downtown in some time.

The 18-acre project would surround the ziggurat building, with structures to the south, east and west of the old Money Store building.

Unlike the ziggurat, the Raley's Landing project promises ample space for retail stores. Built in 1997, the ziggurat has been criticized by urban planners because the building is self-contained - workers generally don't leave during the day to shop or eat at nearby businesses.

"They have a fantastic project," said Mark Friedman, a developer on both sides of the river. "It would be a tremendous addition to the waterfront. It's urban and sophisticated."

West Sacramento's Mayor Christopher Cabaldon - a strong proponent of "walkable" communities - said the fact that the project offers jobs, housing, retail and entertainment makes it ideal for the riverfront.

In the 744-page environmental impact study, pending before the Planning Commission, traffic is cited as the largest potential problem. Long shadows cast by buildings onto homes and construction noise also were cited.

West Sacramento resident Mary Lasell, who attended a Planning Commission meeting in November outlining the environmental study, said her chief concern was the increased traffic.

"Where are these people going to park?" she asked.

While the problem should not be ignored, Cabaldon said, some level of traffic congestion is part of a healthy downtown.

Bringing intense, high-density projects to West Sacramento makes sense, said Robert A. Johnston, professor emeritus at University of California, Davis.

"For a region that has air quality problems and habitat-protection issues it seems like a good idea," said Johnston, an urban growth expert.

Accommodating the region's growth with high-density development near Sacramento's core is far better than building in flat, outlying areas, he said.

Excitement about the project also spans the river.

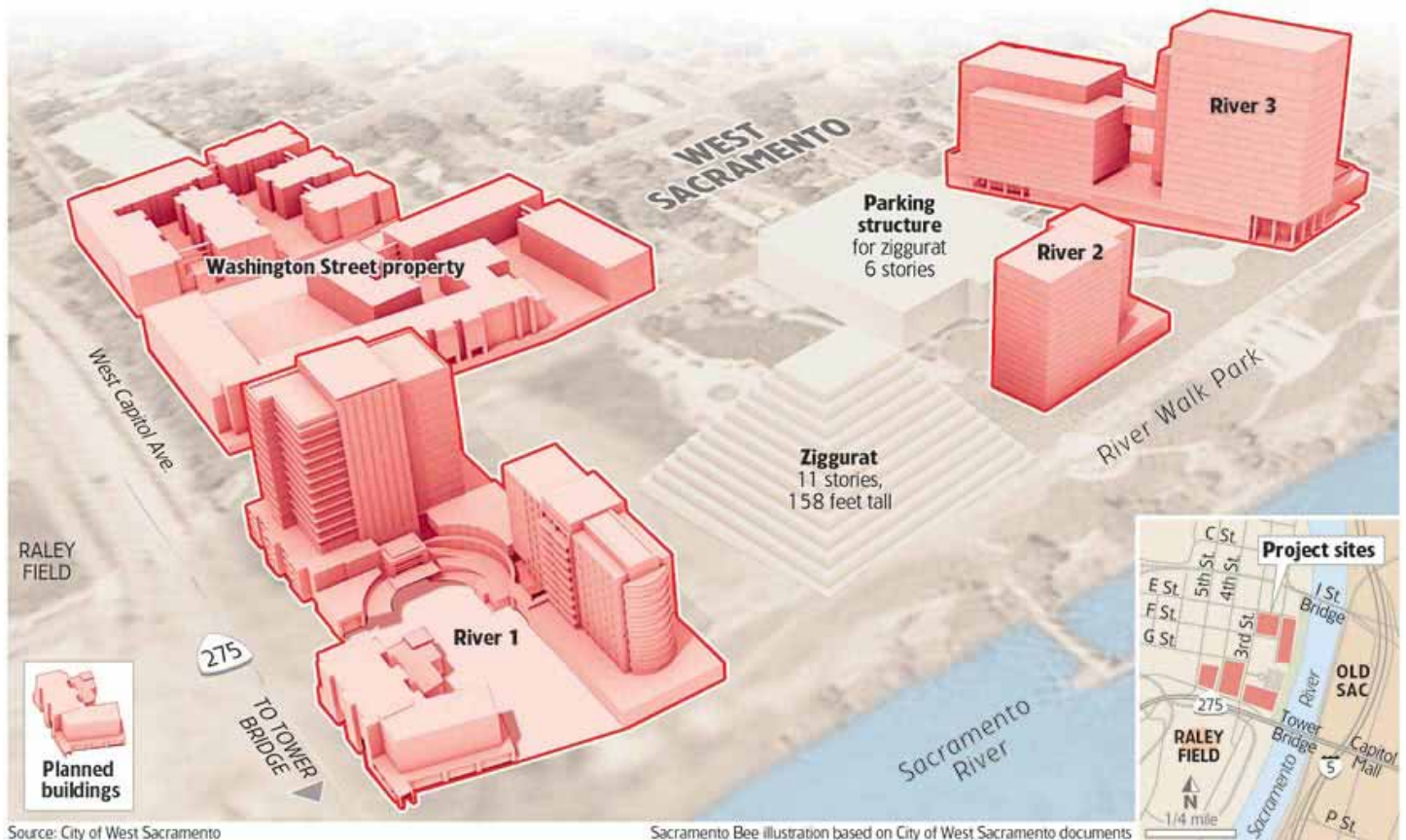
"My favorite part is the housing," said Sacramento Mayor Heather Fargo. "There is enough housing proposed ... to support retail and restaurants. It's going to feel like a neighborhood."

She envisions people living in Sacramento, walking across the Tower Bridge to work in West Sacramento, and vice versa.

"It's a terrific opportunity for us," added Steve Huffman, executive director of the Old Sacramento Business Association. "It's an opportunity for us to orientate our retail mix more toward locals because it will be convenient for them to shop here."

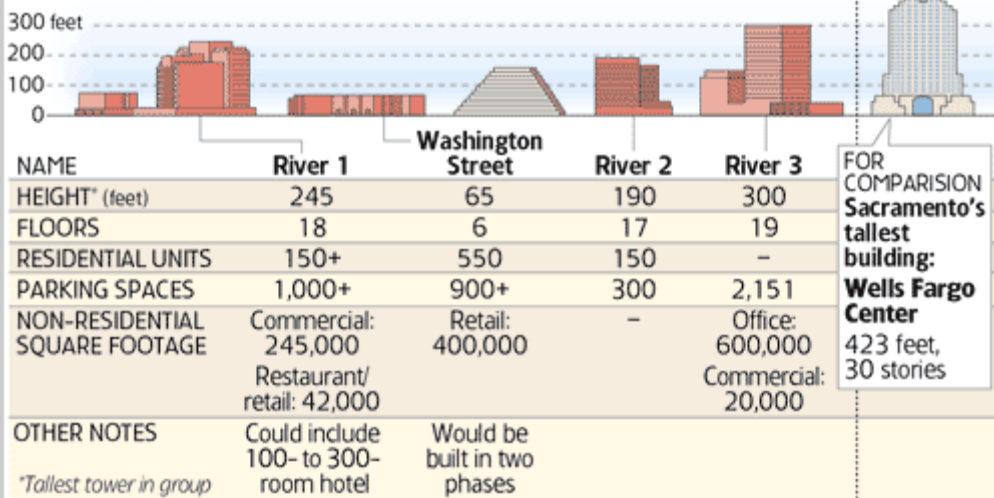
Cabaldon, the West Sacramento mayor, called the River Cats' move across the river five years ago a catalyst for the city.

"None of this - at least on this accelerated time period - would be possible without Raley Field," Cabaldon said. "It's continuing evidence that our little town is able to dream big and be able to get it done."



## Comparing buildings

If built, the Raley's Landing complex of high-, mid-, and low-rise office and residential buildings planned for West Sacramento would dramatically alter Sacramento's skyline. West Sacramento planners envision a "walkable" community that includes jobs, housing, shops and restaurants.



Source: City of West Sacramento

Sacramento Bee/Nathaniel Levine