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Gated community planned for vacant church site at edge of Hilltop

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(<https://s31833.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/9.27D-Hilltop-2-scaled.jpg>)

The former church at 50 S. Colorado Blvd. has been vacant for years. (*Thomas Gounley photo*)

After years of talk about redevelopment, a vacant church at the edge of Hilltop and Cherry Creek is not long for this world.

The boarded-up structure at 50 S. Colorado Blvd. was sold earlier this month to Denver-based First Stone Development.



(<https://s31833.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/9.27D-Hilltop-Lenny-Taub.jpg>)

Lenny Taub

“As soon as I have the permits, I’ll demolish it,” First Stone President Lenny Taub said, calling the property “a blighted site.”

First Stone paid \$3.75 million for the former church and its parking to the north — about 1 acre in all, he said.

Taub said he plans to build a gated community of 20 homes, some of which will likely list for more than \$2 million. And parking for the project — dubbed Hilltop West — will be completely underground, meaning the ground level won’t be dominated by garages.

“The houses will basically face each other, with a walkway that runs down the middle,” Taub said.

The 20 units will be spread across 10 structures, each with two units. The 10 units on the east side of the lot will be about 3,400 square feet. The 10 on the west side of the lot, backing up to Colorado Boulevard, will be somewhat smaller — about 2,700 square feet.

Each unit will have an elevator and three bedrooms, Taub said. The ground floor will have the kitchen and other living space. The bedrooms will be on the second floor. And the third floor will have a “bonus room” that opens onto a rooftop deck.

“You can use that as an office, a party room, even an additional bedroom,” Taub said

The parking situation is “very unique,” Taub said. He said zoning limits the site to three stories, and he almost backed out of his contract to buy it when he realized that a rooftop deck level would count as one.

But Taub said he had already been trying to figure out a way to have the kitchen and living room on the ground level, as opposed to above the garage like in many townhome projects. So he decided to dig.

Now, the plan is that drivers accessing the site from the side streets — there won’t be an entrance off busy Colorado Boulevard — will drive down into the parking level, then ascend into the home and the neighborhood, which will be a little car-free pocket.

“It’s costing a lot more money doing it this way, but we are getting the benefit of building the roof deck,” Taub said.

Taub has submitted a concept plan for the project to the city. While some details could change, he said that, based on the feedback he’s received from the city so far, he’s confident his broad vision will get the green light.

The existing church building dates to 1961, according to property records. The site hasn’t been owned by a religious organization since 2006, when Kingdom of Faith Kingdom Center Inc. sold both parcels to Folsom Ventures LLC for \$1.15 million, records indicate.

First Stone bought the property from an entity affiliated with McKinnon & Associates, led by Doug McKinnon. He purchased the property for \$1.8 million in 2014, records show. McKinnon also owns several largely-unused sites on the other side of Colorado Boulevard, which the city rezoned last year (<https://businessden.com/2020/10/05/council-unanimously-approves-rezoning-for-two-cherry-creek-gateways/>).

One local neighborhood group, the Cranmer Park/Hilltop Civic Association, has been posting updates (<https://denverhilltop.com/agreement-reached-regarding-10-50-s-colorado-blvd-rezoning-application/>) on its website for years about efforts “to move this from eyesore to a development the neighborhood can be comfortable with.” An officer of the organization was quoted in Denverite saying it’s “been a long process” — and that story was published in 2017 (<https://denverite.com/2017/08/14/new-plan-works-former-hilltop-church-along-south-colorado-boulevard/>).

While Taub said he'll demolish the church as soon as he can, there will likely be a pause between then and the start of construction on Hilltop West. He's hopeful he will be able to break ground in 12 to 14 months.

Taub said he's thinking the larger units could list for \$2.1 million, and the smaller ones for \$1.8 million, although that could change given market conditions at the time.

"Right now in Hilltop, I don't think there's any new construction you can buy for that price," he said.

Taub developed in the New York City area for years before moving to Denver about six-and-a-half years ago and shifting his focus here. He's completed numerous townhomes in the Berkeley area.

In June, Taub broke ground on a five-story, 123-unit condominium building in the 600 block of Santa Fe Drive in Lincoln Park, which could be finished in about 18 months, he said. He'll start selling those units in the first quarter, likely asking an average price of \$580 a square foot.

Taub is also planning a 34-unit apartment building in the 4300 block of Tennyson Street and he already purchased the land. He also hopes to start construction in April on a 140-unit townhome project in Winter Park. The two-bedroom units, around 1,200 to 1,300 square feet including garage, will likely start around \$630,000, he said.

"There's a huge demand," he said of the mountain town. "It's underbuilt."

30-50 S. Colorado Blvd., Denver, CO ☆

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