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Goodman Real Estate and Triad Development are developing the Colman Center -- the green structure in this drawing -- on Western Avenue between Marion and Columbia streets. Construction is to begin in July. (Weber + Thompson)

Office building near Colman Dock designed for creative professionals

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By **AUBREY COHEN**
P-I REPORTER

Do you want an office with lots of light, balconies looking out over Elliott Bay and the freedom to personalize more than just the sign on the door?

A building planned for one of the last vacant lots near the downtown Seattle waterfront promises to provide just that.

The Colman Center, which the Downtown/Belltown Design Review Board endorsed Tuesday evening, would rise 12 stories along Western Avenue, between Marion and Columbia streets, with about 159,100 square feet of office space and 14,700 square feet of retail space.

The building is aiming for creative professionals, said Tim Dickerson, investment manager for Goodman Real Estate, which is developing the site with Triad Development.

"There's ... an underserved class of tenant that has a hard time finding space in Seattle," he said. "They take cool space, and they create their own identity in that space."

Most downtown office buildings give tenants a proscribed box, with very little opportunity for customization, Dickerson said. That, he said, is why creative companies end up moving to places such as Pioneer Square.

The Colman Center will let companies create bright, open, unique spaces, with high ceilings, decks and terraces, and will feature hip, high-tech common areas.

"This building is a Macintosh," said architect Blaine Weber, of Weber + Thompson. "Most buildings in downtown Seattle are PCs."

The building will help attract and keep top talent, and will even be a catalyst for new ideas thanks to features such as common area nooks where all these creative professionals can sit down for impromptu breakout sessions after they bump into one another in the lobby or elevator, Weber and Dickerson said.



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They building's facade will distinguish itself with elements such as a curved wall and translucent gold glass. It will tie into a pedestrian bridge from First Avenue to the ferry terminal with a second-floor deck and restaurant space, and stairs from the bridge down to Post Avenue.

The developers plan to put stores along quiet Post Avenue to the east, which would have pedestrian-friendly paving and could be closed off for the occasional evening party.

John Anicker, the chief operating officer of the brand consultancy firm Hornall Anderson, said the Colman Center was the kind of building his company was looking for two years ago, when it outgrew its space in the National Building.

"Being a creative shop, we weren't really looking to get into the typical class-A high rise," said Anicker, whose firm has produced marketing materials for the Colman Center. "We wanted something a little funkier."

Having an open space promotes collaboration, and being in a building with other creative businesses creates an aura that customers like, he said. "When a client works with us, sometimes it's the favorite part of our day, especially if they're coming from a very corporate environment."

Hornall Anderson ended up in the Dexter Horton Building, where it built out the space with high ceilings that exposed ducts and wiring and open work areas with lots of natural light.

Anicker and Leigh Callaghan, a senior vice president of Colliers International in Seattle, see a growing market for less-traditional office space like the Colman Center.

"People are looking for a little different look and feel," said Callaghan, whose company is not involved in the project. "There's certainly a move by companies to have more open environments."

The developers are aiming for "silver" or "gold" certification under the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program, whose ratings for environmentally friendly, energy-efficient buildings go from "certified" to "platinum."

Callaghan said companies also are increasingly interested in green office space, although there isn't much out there, particularly for larger operations.

"I think as you see more buildings being built and more choices available to those tenants it will be an issue," he said.

Dickerson declined to give a cost estimate for the building, but said it would be in line with similar projects. He expected rents to be "on the slightly higher end of the market rent range." The developers expect to break ground in July and complete the building in December 2008.

INNOVATIONS AT HOME

Colman Center architectural firm Weber + Thompson has incorporated many alternative office features into a South Lake Union building that will include its new headquarters.

The Terry Avenue Office Building, under construction at Terry Avenue North and Thomas Street, will wrap four floors around a central courtyard, allowing more sunlight and natural ventilation through windows that will open. Rather than using air conditioning, the building will stay cool with natural ventilation, along with special heat-filtering window shades and a roof coating. Heating will come from individually controlled radiators.

Much of this is about attracting and keeping top talent, Weber + Thompson principal Scott Thompson

said.

A firm survey showed that employees wanted windows that open and provide lots of natural light, and a nice lounge and kitchen, he said. "We put the employee lounge/kitchen at the best spot in the building -- at the corner of Terry and Thomas, where normally you'd put conference room No. 1 to impress your clients."

Thompson also hopes the building will show that such alternatives work.

"Our profession is pushing in this direction," he said. "It's just a matter of us convincing our clients that it's the way to go."

P-I reporter Aubrey Cohen can be reached at 206-448-8362 or aubreycohen@seattlepi.com.

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