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Extell's Chief Thinking Tall For Midtown

BY ELIOT BROWN

Gary Barnett, one of New York's leading developers, is planning a new Midtown skyscraper that could rise 300 feet higher than the Empire State Building, and he's hired the architect who designed the world's tallest tower.

Mr. Barnett said in an interview that his Extell Development Co. has tapped Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture LLP to design an apartment tower atop the city's first Nordstrom Inc. department store.

Mr. Smith was the lead designer on the 2,717-foot Burj Khalifa in Dubai when he worked for Skidmore Owings & Merrill LLP. He and partner Gordon Gill left Skidmore to start their own firm in 2006.

The firm "is very expert in this field, and we want to do a really high-quality, great building," Mr. Barnett said.

New York-based Extell is aiming high: Last month, the company filed a permit application to build a 1,550-foot tower on the site just east of Broadway between 57th and 58th streets. While the precise height could easily change—Mr. Barnett said plans were very preliminary—the developer is clearly gearing up to build one of the tallest towers in the city, and one that would offer sweeping views of Central Park a block to the north.

Of course, any groundbreaking is still quite a ways off and Extell needs to line up crucial construction financing. But Mr. Barnett said, "It's going to be a tall building."

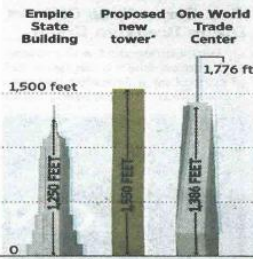
Plans for the building are moving forward at a time that a new type of skyscraper is beginning to emerge on the Manhattan skyline. For decades, office towers accounted for most of the towers built more than 600 feet high, while top residential apartments were generally found in low-slung Upper East Side cooperatives. But now a handful of developers are building very tall, slender luxury residential towers, betting that the wealthy will pay for great views.

Mr. Barnett, currently one of the city's most prolific developers, has been on the vanguard of this change. A few blocks east of the Nordstrom tower site on 57th Street, Mr. Barnett is building One57, a 1,004-foot tower. Extell has said two buyers have agreed to pay more than \$90 million for penthouse apartments there, which would be a record price.

On 57th Street and Park Avenue, CIM Group and developer Harry Macklowe are building an approximately 1,395-foot condo tower with a waffle-like exterior. "As with all skyscrapers, it's the economics that makes them possible, and it's a strong market," says Carol Willis, founding director of the Lower Manhattan-

To the Top

A planned tower could rise 300 feet above the Empire State Building.



*According to building permit applications
Source: Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat
The Wall Street Journal

based Skyscraper Museum. "People who are willing to pay a great deal—millions and tens of millions for apartments in the sky—there's a market for that."

If Mr. Barnett's latest project does indeed reach 1,550 feet, it's not exactly clear how it would officially rank among the city's tallest buildings.

The developer building One World Trade Center, formerly known as the Freedom Tower, has put that structure's height at 1,776 feet, which would make it

'People who are willing to pay a great deal...there's a market for that.'

the city's tallest building.

But that height includes One World Trade Center's 408-foot mast. Its owners say the mast is an architectural element and should be considered toward its height, but others may consider it simply an antenna, given that an architectural shell around the mast was stripped from the design during the development.

The Chicago-based nonprofit Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat is the arbiter, though it isn't set to rule until after One World Trade Center is complete in 2014. If the mast isn't included, it would be shorter than the 1,550 feet being eyed by Mr. Barnett.

Extell chose Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture for the 57th Street tower after considering a number of avant-garde architects for the project. Those included Swiss designers Herzog & de Meuron, and New York-based SHoP Architects, one of the designers of the new Barclays Center arena in Brooklyn, according to people briefed on

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Towering Over Empire State Building

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the selection process.

But this summer, Extell secured a commitment from Seattle-based Nordstrom to build its first New York City location—a 285,000-square-foot store—on the site, and Nordstrom recommended the Chicago-based design firm, Mr. Barnett said.

Colin Johnson, a spokesman for Nordstrom, said it believes the architectural firm shares its

vision for a top-quality design for the building, which is scheduled to open in 2018.

“We want to have our best Nordstrom store in the best retail city in the world,” Mr. Johnson said. “That means being part of a building that we hope will become an iconic part of the Manhattan landscape.”

Nordstrom would be in the base of the building. The building permit application calls for a

hotel above the Nordstrom store, between floors seven and 12, while apartments and mechanical equipment would account for the remainder up to the top, 88th floor.

One challenge for Mr. Barnett may come from a rival development firm with similar plans. Just one block to the north, Vornado Realty Trust is planning to build a condominium tower that could obstruct many views from

Extell’s building, though the planned height is unclear.

Mr. Barnett, however, stands to delay the timing of that building, 220 Central Park South. He controls the lease to a parking garage on the site that runs until 2018, thus having the ability to block Vornado from building in the short term.

The two have been battling behind the scenes, with no public resolution as of yet.