

Spring condo breaks ground next week

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Almost two years to the day after it was announced, the much-debated Spring condominium tower will break ground Tuesday.

The 42-story tower at Third and Bowie streets will have nearly 250 units, with the top floor, originally designed to accommodate four penthouses, already purchased by one buyer as a single living space.

Developers declined to name the buyer but said he is an executive from Advanced Micro Devices. They did not disclose the price.

So far, 85 units are under contract, with the least expensive one-bedrooms already reserved. One-bedroom condos start at \$237,000 and have 575 square feet. The majority of the condominiums, two-bedroom, two-bath units, range from \$430,000 to \$530,000.

When developers debuted their plans in July 2005 for a 36-story tower, some neighborhood groups just west of downtown protested that it would be too tall for the area and organized opposition to a zoning change that would allow for extra height. The debate has been repeated with some other edge-of-downtown projects. But downtown neighborhood and business groups rallied behind Spring, and in late 2005, the City Council approved the zoning change. Developers later amended their design to the current 42 floors — 36 for condos and the rest for parking and ground-floor retail.

After the additional height was approved, developers Robert Barnstone, Perry Lorenz, Larry Warshaw and Diana Zuniga agreed to give \$125,000 to the Austin Parks Foundation and \$125,000 to a nonprofit that helps low-income homeowners avoid foreclosure.

The project, designed by Rafii Architects of Vancouver, British Columbia, will be a point tower, with a slender design that allows each unit to have glass-walled living rooms and bedrooms overlooking the city. The project will be completed in 2009.

"It's going to be a beautiful anchor for the west end of downtown," Zuniga said. "It's the point tower design that makes the project unique. Instead of having long hotel-like corridors, you have a real sense of privacy" with floors having from four to eight units.

Amenities include an in-house fitness center, private guest quarters and a pool. Spring developers are building a joint parking garage under the tower with the Schlosser Development Corp., which has a retail project at Fifth Street and Lamar Boulevard that will be completed in spring 2009.