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From the Puget Sound Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/seattle/news/2022/10/20/mass-timber-tower-eyed-seven-gables-site-seattle.html>

Mass timber tower planned for Seven Gables site in University District

Oct 20, 2022, 2:08pm PDT

It appears that Mark Cuban is jumping on the apartment development bandwagon in the University District.

A proposal for a 240-foot tall, mass timber residential building was listed in a city of Seattle blog Tuesday. The Seven Gables Theatre operated on the property until closing in 2017, after which neighbors reported squatters broke into the movie house, which was destroyed in a Christmas Eve 2020 fire.

It's not clear if the building would actually reach 240 feet tall, or about 24 stories. A building and land-use application to the city states for the site says a 13-story tower is planned.



ANTHONY BOLANTE | PSBJ

A 240-foot tall mass-timber residential tower has been proposed for the site of the Seven Gables Theatre, which was destroyed in a fire on Christmas Eve in 2020. The property is owned by a limited liability company affiliated with billionaire Mark Cuban.

The Business Journal contacted Cuban and fellow billionaire Todd Wagner's company, 2929 Productions of Los Angeles, but has not heard back.

About a month after the fire, 2929 Productions transferred ownership of the Seven Gables property and adjoining parcels to 2929 Real Estate, according to an affidavit filed with King County. The two companies have the same address.

The proposed tower will have 170 residential units and underground parking, according to the city blog, which lists projects in the early stage of development.

A spokesperson for the developer wouldn't say who the developer is, but the project manager is Josh Onyschuk of Charity Network. Charity Network's address is the same as 2929's.

Seattle architecture company Clark Barnes is listed in the blog as the designer of the tower, which would be one of the tallest mass timber buildings in the world. This is Clark Barnes' sixth mass timber commission.

A 25-story, 284-foot-tall mass timber building, the Ascent MKE, opened in Milwaukee, according to a post on the U.S. Forest Service website. The Wisconsin tower moved ahead of an 18-story building in Norway as the world's tallest such structure.

Construction is underway on what's believed to be the state's tallest mass timber, or cross-laminated timber (CLT) project, the eight-story Heartwood apartments on Seattle's First Hill. It's believed to be tallest mass timber project in the state.

Building with renewable, carbon-sequestering mass timber is more sustainable than concrete-and-steel construction and steel, the production of which is one of the world's most energy-consuming and carbon dioxide-emitting industrial activities.

Mass timber uses small and medium-sized trees to create beams, columns and building components. Removal of these trees from over-populated forests supports healthy forest management and reduces wildfire risk, the Forest Service blog post states.

Apartment tower development in the University District has been running full throttle since before the city upzoned the neighborhood in 2017. Since then projects with just over 4,400 apartment units have opened or are under construction, according to Cushman & Wakefield, whose count includes three projects outside of the upzoned area.

To the west of the U District, in the Wallingford area, Cuban and Wagner's company last month demolished the shuttered Guild 45th II movie theater. At the time, a representative of the demo contractor, Home Care Contractors LLC of Bothell, said plans for the property were "still up in the air," and hung up when asked if Cuban's company had hired his firm.

The original Guild 45th building, built in 1920, remains standing.

The Guild 45th and Seven Gables were part of Landmark Theatres chain, which Cohen and Wagner sold in 2018. The sole remaining Landmark property in the Seattle region is is the Crest Cinema Center in Shoreline.

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