

[« BCR's Daily Fishwrap Report for July 22, 2009 | Main | Rough starts on blue carts as recycling bins continue slow march to final 2,000 homes »](#)

July 22, 2009

Scientific proposes 1.9 million sq. ft. development -- maybe -- for old Johnson Chrysler site



Things are quiet on the six acre lot that served as Johnson Chrysler's short-lived operations (since buying the dealership from Elkins) at Jackie Robinson and Mangum, a victim of the automaker's bankruptcy reorganization.

But that's not keeping new site owner Scientific Properties from getting their papers in order for the eventual proposed Van Alen development on the site -- which sits just south of the eventual new county courthouse, and next door to American Tobacco.

And while most of the attention in downtown development in the past year has been on the ATC and Greenfire's city center plans, a recent set of filings reveals that Scientific is in no way thinking small for the site -- though according to Scientific's Durham-based CEO, it's by no means a given that the developer would build out all the space they're pegging for the site in the entitlement process.

How much space, you ask? A minor site plan filed with the city and examined by the development review board last month proposed 1,858,200 sq. ft. of office, commercial and residential space they're planning for the site.

In non-technical terms, that's roughly a heapin' crapload of developed space on a fairly compact 6.16 acre site.

By one metric, it's just less than twice the size of American Tobacco's first phase of office space; much larger than West Village's 1.2m sq. ft. or so.

Now, it's by no means clear that Scientific is going to build out that much space.

BCR caught up with Scientific Properties' Tucker Bartlett and Friday night's one-year anniversary of Golden Belt, where Bartlett made it clear that nothing is likely to happen on the Van Alen project until the developer is able to line up tenants for the space.

Bartlett noted that Scientific was making use of the downturn to get all of the entitlement paperwork taken care of on the site. The square footage and other characteristics requested, Bartlett noted, ultimately would allow the greatest flexibility when a tenant was lined up.

And given Scientific's interest in bringing a corporate HQ to downtown Durham, that means preserving the opportunity to ultimately build a "signature" building on the site, which is located right off the Durham Freeway.

Back of the envelope: an acre's about 40,000 sq. ft., give or take. A single story building encompassing the entirety of the 6 acres could hold a quarter-million square feet, meaning you'd need a 6-7 story building filling the site to achieve the size of leasable space Scientific's proposed.

Except, of course, office towers aren't 6 acres in footprint; each of the World Trade Center towers had a one-acre or so footprint, for instance. Since you're going to need circulation space between the towers, you'd more realistically be looking at 3-4 towers -- each in the 15-20 story height range -- to achieve that kind of square footage on the site.

As it happens, the site in question is in what's currently the DDO-1 district of downtown, which has a 20-story or 200' (whichever is lesser) height limit. Scientific applied for a 30 foot height allowance for the site, a request unanimously approved by the DRB -- numbers that certainly, in combination with the back-of-the-envelope numbers, support these height estimates.

Of course, all of this is pure (but delicious) speculation pending any tenants being lined up, and of course there's this small matter of an economic turnaround.

Still, it must have been hard for hardened Durhamites to imagine the transformation of the Bull City's core in the past twenty years, from missteps like the Durham Centre to the terrific Durham Bulls stadium, American Tobacco, West Village and the DPAC.

Now imagine how different downtown might look with office towers rising next to Diamond View and the ballpark right along the freeway -- with the new County Courthouse rising right behind it.

Taken that way, it's not hard to imagine a Durham urban core looking much different ten years from now than it does at this point in time.

More on the Van Alen project [from the LoopNet description](#):

Rising on the most prominent site at the center of downtown Durham's dynamic business and cultural district, Scientific Properties' Van Alen project will establish a new standard for contemporary, downtown mixed-use development in the Research Triangle Park, North Carolina region. With architecturally stunning, environmentally sustainable LEED-certified high-rise office towers, a full-service hotel, corporate conference facilities, luxury residences and a unique assortment of restaurants and boutique retail offerings, Mangum Street will offer tenants and visitors alike a virtually unrivalled combination of extraordinary functionality, environmental responsibility and sophisticated amenities. Defining the new downtown Durham skyline and visible for miles around, the Van Alen high-rise towers will directly overlook the Durham Bulls Athletic Park and the new Durham Performing Arts Center, and provide dramatic views reaching across the entire Triangle region.

Van Alen is located on what is unarguably the best site in downtown Durham. Van Alen has direct access to Highway 147 and is easily accessible from I-40 and I-85. Within 10 minutes to the Research Triangle Park and 15 minutes to the Raleigh-Durham International Airport, Van Alen is an ideal location for a corporate headquarters. Duke University is within 5 minutes drive and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is within 15 minutes drive.

[Email this](#)

You might also like:

Scientific Properties "Van Alen" plans start to appear

Scientific Properties, InSite to unveil Golden Belt area ...

ATC's Old Bull sign now illuminated

[LinkWithin](#)