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SDBJ Poll

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- Build it.
- Forget it.
-

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Work Gets Under Way to Lower Sunroad Tower

180-Foot-Tall, 12-Story High-Rise to Be Reduced 20 Feet

By MICHELLE MOWAD

SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL STAFF

Workers began toiling to remove the top of Sunroad Enterprises' Centrum high-rise office building off Kearny Villa Road near Montgomery Field in Kearny Mesa last week. The developer was ordered by the city to lower the 180-foot-tall structure by 20 feet after safety concerns by the Federal Aviation Administration, California Department of Transportation and city of San Diego bureaucrats were ignored for months.

Sunroad agreed in late June to lower the height of the 300,000-square-foot, 12-story building, deemed a hazard to the nearby airfield, after filing a \$40 million lawsuit against the city. The litigious battle to reduce the building height to 160 feet has sparked speculations and accusations by area residents, community activists and the general aviation community.

Yet, comments by parties directly involved in the controversy are hard to come by.

The developer declined to comment. The lead architect, San Diego-based BPA Architecture Planning Interiors, also declined to comment due to the sensitivity of the matter. The general contractor, San Francisco-based Swinerton Inc., did not return a series of calls in a three-day period last week. A Burnham Real Estate broker handling leasing and marketing also did not return calls.

"The easy answer for what it is going to take is money," said Ken Walsh, director of the construction engineering program at San Diego State University, when asked what's involved in completing such a project.

Delays, Dramatic Cost Increases

Walsh, a professor who has his doctorate in civil engineering, says the tedious process of removing the top 20 feet by lowering materials, including steel, concrete and glass, piece by piece will be expensive and time-consuming.



"You have two really bad things happening," explained Walsh. "You are delaying the date they can begin collecting rents and dramatically increasing the cost of the initial investment." The building was scheduled for completion this summer.

He estimated the costs to comply with regulations could be 30 percent to 50 percent of the initial building costs. The developer declined to disclose the cost of the project.

Deconstructing a portion of the Class A office building, marketed as the tallest building in Kearny Mesa, capped with an

"architectural roof element reaching for the sky," will also force a change in mechanical systems in the lower floors, according to Walsh.

Systems, including the heating, air conditioning and ventilation, which were installed based on the initial square footage of the office tower, will be oversized and inefficient with the removal of the top two floors, he said.

Walsh says there are a number of components in the building's mechanical systems that will most likely need to be replaced. The elevator will need to be redesigned, reordered and rebuilt. The plumbing and fire safety systems may need a second look, and replacement or adjustment.

"Unfortunately those are the components that take a really long time to get," he said.

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