

Upscale apartments planned for O'Fallon, Ill.

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O'FALLON, ILL. — Balke Brown Associates of St. Louis plans to start work this spring on a 232-unit, high-end apartment development near the intersection of Green Mount Road and Frank Scott Parkway East.

The CEO, Steve Brown, said he thinks Parkway Lakeside Apartment Houses will be the premier upscale apartment complex in the St. Louis area.

Brown said the \$27 million project makes sense because of its location. He said there is a strong market for luxury apartments in the area around Scott Air Force Base, which employs about 15,000 people and is largely unaffected by the current recession.

"(Many) people don't understand that Scott Air Force Base is the Number 3 employer in the St. Louis area," Brown said. "Scott is growing and adding people."

The apartments will be built on a 20-acre site on the north side of Frank Scott Parkway, about 2,000 feet west of Green Mount Road. It will be adjacent to Green Mount Lakes Apartments, built by Balke Brown Associates five years ago and later sold. The two projects are at the edge of a booming restaurant and retail district and about a minute's drive from Interstate 64. The company owns five acres of adjacent land planned for commercial development.

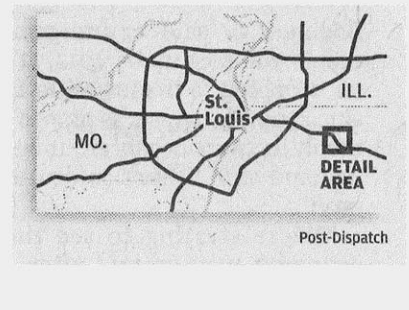
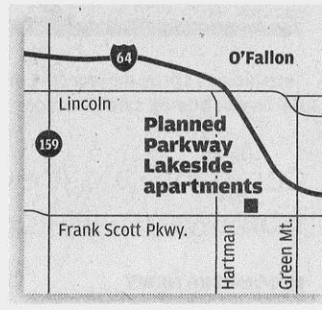
The building contractor will be Holland Construction Services of Swansea. Riverstone Residential of Dallas will manage the property for Balke Brown.

Humphreys & Partners of Dallas designed it, using the "big house" concept pioneered by that firm.

The 20 two-story apartment structures will have 10 to 14 units and be designed to look like large houses. The buildings will have only single front entrances with no breezeways or exposed stairways. Many units will have enclosed parking. Other amenities will include fireplaces, patios, balconies, a clubhouse, a swimming pool, a putting green, a walking trail and a recreational lake.

Prices will range from \$950 monthly for a one-bedroom apartment to \$1,650 for a two-bedroom unit with two-car garage.

Some aldermen questioned the company's proposal to make some parking spaces a foot shorter than the city's 19-foot requirement, but the City Council ultimately agreed to variances that will allow 11 fewer parking spaces than the 476 that otherwise would be required by city code.



Brown said the council agreed that 60 percent of those could be 18 feet rather than 19 feet deep and said the variances will allow a design that will feature 45 percent open or green space.

"We made the argument that green is better than black," he said. "I think the project would have been less eco-friendly" if built to the letter of the code.

Ted Shekell, O'Fallon's planning and zoning director, said city officials welcome the project.

"Balke Brown has been a great part of our town so far," he said. In addition to the earlier apartment development, the company also built an office building on the other side of I-64.

Shekell said he thinks the new development will be "a good fit for O'Fallon and this area. In a tough economic environment, we're happy to have them interested in our community. I think it's the kind of project you need for people who aren't looking to buy (single-family houses) right now."

Shekell said development has slowed in O'Fallon, but the city of 30,000 still had 110 new houses started in 2009. That's down from a 15-year average of 240, but house building is a near standstill in many area communities and around the country.

"Scott is a leveling influence on the economy of this area," Shekell said. There has been a downturn but investment has not stopped."

Brown said the area "feels like a young Chesterfield" to him.

"There is no recession there," he said.