

# Inside Balke Brown Transwestern's strategy for \$85M Clayton redevelopment



By [Steph Kukuljan](#) – Reporter, St. Louis Business Journal  
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The Zoom community meeting was a first for [Steve Brown](#), CEO and managing partner of commercial real estate firm Balke Brown Transwestern.

He detailed his latest project, the \$85 million Bemiston Place in downtown Clayton, two weeks ago to a faceless, virtual crowd, hoping the biggest takeaway those 120 attendees would get is that the luxury apartment project will be built in collaboration with residents.

"I want to build something they can all be proud of, that they feel good about when they drive by and look at it," Brown said.

Bemiston Place is a 240-unit multifamily development with a courtyard (Clayton's first), pool and two-level restaurant and bar that Brown says will help to address Clayton's reputation of having a non-existent nightlife. The restaurant will have glass doors that pivot up to make it an indoor-outdoor space in nice weather. It's the firm's biggest

project since walking away [from a \\$39.5 million proposed development](#) in the Central West End after the firm couldn't make the parking work.

Swansea, Illinois-based Holland Construction Services has been tapped as general contractor of Bemiston Place, and East Coast-based Hord Coplan Macht is the architect. Lawrence Group also is involved in the project, helping with zoning, titling and construction.

Brown and his firm have taken over the development of the half-block of real estate at Central, Maryland and Bemiston avenues from businessman [Fred Kummer](#).

Kummer, the founder of HBE Corp., acquired the property [in February 2019](#) from the Gershman family and affiliated entities with plans to create [a \\$170 million](#) mixed-use development with condos and new retail. He faced pushback from residents who disliked both the design and the plan.

By early 2020, momentum slowed.

That's when Brown reached out to friend Steve Smith, co-founder of Lawrence Group and Kummer's architectural consultant, for an introduction.

"He had a twinkle in his eye and he was full of energy and sharp wit," Brown said of his first impressions of Kummer. "Once he puts his mind to something he's going to do, Fred is like a bulldog.

"It was not easy to convince him to let us take over the reins," he said.

Balke Brown Transwestern expects to close on the purchase of the property by November 2021, Brown said.

The company launched a [website](#) for the project soon after in a bid to be transparent with residents — a move Brown sought to do after reading the minutes of public meetings about Kummer's project.

"It became very apparent to me ... that the neighborhood was very nervous about what was going to be built and they cared a lot about design," Brown said. "The founder of my firm, Gary Balke, always taught that the buildings we build belong to the community. The most successful buildings are the ones embraced by the community."

One aspect of the plan that's likely to be embraced by the community is the saving of the Shanley Building, at 7800 Maryland Ave., a historic building that was St. Louis' first International Style building. Brown's plans call for the building to be rehabbed and transformed into an office building. Kummer's plans called for the building's demolition, which angered preservationists.

In the meantime, Balke Brown Transwestern will review comments from residents to refine the project and then submit a formal plan to Clayton's Plan

Commission in mid-October. City approval is expected by the end of the year. The groundbreaking is expected to start in October 2021 and take two years to complete, Brown said.