

Commercial Real Estate

Chevy Chase's 4-H conference center has officially sold. Here's a look at what comes next.



By Alex Koma – Staff Reporter, Washington Business Journal
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The National 4-H Council's Chevy Chase campus is set to be redeveloped into a senior living community now that a sale of the property has officially closed.

Atlanta-based senior home developer Galerie Living and D.C.'s Community Three Development announced Monday they've finalized their purchase of the 12-acre conference center site for \$40 million — roughly double its assessed value of \$19.9 million. The team has been under contract with the 4-H since late August, after CBRE helped the nonprofit arrange a sale.

The developers are still in the process of hashing out a vision for the Maryland site, bringing on Torti Gallas + Partners as architect and Soltesz as engineer. They plan to present preliminary details to the town of Chevy Chase and Montgomery County in the first quarter of 2022.

"We're not some developer coming in fast and furious and trying to throw something together," Tim Gary, Galerie's founder and CEO, said in an interview. "We're going to do it right and be patient."

The 4-H Council first decided to explore a sale of the property, located at 7100 Connecticut Ave., in March after the pandemic forced the cancellation of most large events and hammered the group's revenues. Gary said his firm heard about the opportunity soon afterward, considering that he'd long been looking for the chance to expand into the D.C. market — Galerie currently operates four communities throughout Georgia.

He believes the conference center site, which the 4-H has owned since 1951, amounts to a "natural fit" for his firm's model. Galerie constructs multibuilding senior living communities with an array of dining facilities and "hospitality components" for visitors, and Gary expects that this site will be well-suited for that purpose.



President Dwight D. Eisenhower presided over opening ceremonies of the National 4-H Conference Center at 7100 Connecticut Ave. in Chevy Chase in 1959. The property is under new ownership for the first time in 70 years.

He said he's not sure yet whether the development team will be able to reuse any of the existing 228,000-square-foot conference center, which has played host to youth events for decades. Gary said the developers will explore that option, though their "primary focus is the impacts of the building on residents."

Gary also hopes to consider how to "build to the architecture of the community," and said the team has begun discussions with Chevy Chase officials about their

plans for the property — the buyers first began holding meetings with the town back in September. The 4-H Council's decision to sell has attracted intense interest from neighbors, prompting some to call for the town to try and purchase the property, with fears of a large residential development overwhelming the community.

However, Gary said all of his communications with residents have been generally positive thus far, considering that a senior living community is a far cry from a more traditional apartment project.

"People want it to be part of the community," Gary said. "They want it to look and feel like part of it, which is a focus for us."

Gary hopes that Community Three will be a big part of assisting in that process, given their experience locally. The firm has generally focused on medium-sized residential projects with its past work, including the overhaul of the former Grimke School on D.C.'s U Street NW corridor and the residential conversion of three office buildings near Alexandria's Tide Lock Park.

Montgomery County planners will be the main authority for reviewing the team's development proposal, though Gary said he expects to work closely with the town as well (as the small locality has some review powers over select elements of the project). Chevy Chase Mayor Barney Rush sent a letter to the developers Sept. 30 laying out his priorities for the development, requesting the protection of the property's tree canopy and the inclusion of some shared park space there.

Meanwhile, the 4-H Council, the nonprofit partner of the national Cooperative Extension System and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, has pledged to remain active in the D.C. region despite the sale. The group works with more than 100 universities across the country to manage youth development programs focusing on agricultural, leadership and other issues.