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Fork Heart Knife | Scott Beseler

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\$45M Mercer Commons development to transform large swath of Over-the-Rhine

SOAPBOX, 5/11/2010

In December 2009, the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC) [landed \\$4.2 million in historic tax credits](#) from the State of Ohio. That money will cover almost 10 percent of the \$45 million development project that will restore 19 historic buildings and build three new mixed-use buildings, and 14 townhomes. The project will include approximately 15,000 square feet of first-floor commercial space, 155 residential units and a four-level, 275-space parking garage.

The 2.2 acre [Mercer Commons site](#) has long been a sticking point in Over-the-Rhine. Negotiations to sell the land from [Cincinnati Public Schools](#) to 3CDC took some time, and the scale of the site has made it a difficult development prospect for a neighborhood still in the midst of a dramatic urban revitalization.

Officials at 3CDC are hoping that with the tax credit and recent momentum in the immediate area, that now is the time to move forward. New designs have been released and the debate is shifting from whether the project will happen, to how its impact will be felt in the historic neighborhood.

"The Mercer Commons project has the ability to infuse dramatic change through Over-the-Rhine with its large footprint and modern aesthetic," described Greg Meckstroth, Urban Designer with [RW Armstrong](#).

"Ironically, the project's transformative nature has given way to the neighborhood's traditional urban forms, something that is reflected in the plan's urban design. Ultimately, this is the project's greatest achievement."

The plan calls for a new structure along Vine Street with a modern appeal that will stand in stark contrast with the existing 19th Century building stock nearby. The new above-ground parking garage will be hidden



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behind a mixed-use building constructed along Vine Street. Meanwhile, historic structures will be restored throughout the site while new infill structures are mixed in to fill existing open lots.

"A great aspect of this urban design is its respect for the current traditional form while still infusing the neighborhood with a modern aesthetic," Meckstroth explained. "There is little to complain about this design. It's urban, compact, contextually sensitive, and handles the parking garage beautifully, tucking the structure behind the street wall and forcing it towards the center of the block."

[3CDC](#) President Steve Leeper has stated that the goal is to include both market-rate and affordable housing units in the completed project, while also leaving as many buildings intact on the site as possible. But as far as design goes, the envelope seems like it will once again be pushed in Over-the-Rhine as new infill projects mingle with historic structures in one of America's greatest urban neighborhoods.

"This design, along with 14/v and Trinity Flats, is truly raising the bar for high quality urban design in Cincinnati," Meckstroth continued. "As these condo and apartment units continue to fill up, solidifying this model of urbanism as a solid financial investment in the City, expect even better, higher quality urban designs in the future."

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