

# Willow Valley goes big in downtown Lancaster

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Willow Valley Communities' 20-story Mosaic will be the tallest building in Lancaster. PHOTO/PROVIDED

Willow Valley Communities unveiled plans for a 20-story, mixed-use apartment building in downtown Lancaster.

The 244-foot-high, glass-walled tower, designed by globally recognized architectural company Gensler, would be the tallest structure in Lancaster, according to LNP | LancasterOnline.

Willow Valley Mosaic will feature 147 two- and three-bedroom units for people 55 and older, plus a host of amenities, on the upper floors, and restaurants and shops on the ground floor. The commercial areas will be open to the public.

The proposal for the project was presented at the Dec. 21 virtual meeting of the City of Lancaster Historical Commission. The plan aligns with the growing popularity of senior living communities in urban areas, as baby boomers seek a different retirement setting than what their parents had.



They want an engaged lifestyle and walkability, said John G. Swanson, CEO of Willow Valley Living, the management company of Willow Valley Communities. Because Willow Valley residents come from all over country – 37 states, currently – it's difficult to do traditional market studies, he said.

Willow Valley examines industry materials and real estate trends in a number of areas, including the active adult market, Swanson said.

Willow Valley has approximately 1,800 independent units at its suburban campus south of Lancaster, and demand is still strong for that, Swanson said.

Mosaic adds a different product type to the mix, he said. "It gives people who want Willow Valley a new option."



And Lancaster is a great city in a great location, Swanson said, with easy access to Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia and New York City.

Construction is expected to start in 2022, Willow Valley officials said. The building will be at the site of the former LNP production facility at South Queen and West Vine streets. All LNP structures will be torn down to make way for Mosaic, while the 18th-century Jasper Yeates house at 24 S. Queen St. will be preserved and restored.

Roof surfaces at multiple levels will feature terraces and roof-top gardens, visible from the street. The porte cochère, or covered entrance, for vehicles will be from Vine Street, with additional pedestrian entries along Queen. Residents will have reserved spaces for their vehicles at Steinman Park Garage next door, with access to a connecting, elevated walkway.

For several years, Willow Valley Communities had been exploring downtown sites for expansion of its campus, which is south of the city, officials said. It's also partnering with city leaders and Lancaster Equity to develop a plan to revitalize the landmark Southern Market Center across the street from the Mosaic site.

"We're especially excited to introduce new destination experiences and further support Lancaster's economic development," Swanson said in the release.

"This type of local investment and partnership will be viewed as a model for other communities — continuing the growth of our City, creating new residential and recreational experiences, and providing job opportunities for our citizens," said Marshall W. Snively, president of Lancaster City Alliance, in a written statement.

Since Willow Valley Communities announced its plans to expand to downtown Lancaster last year, it has been partnering with Gensler, which describes its architectural focus as "working together to reimagine the future of cities."

The Historical Commission, where Willow Valley revealed the Mosaic proposal, reviews projects that will have an impact on the surrounding streetscape in the city's Heritage Conservation District.

"We are paying meticulous attention to the building's architecture, exterior aesthetics and ground-level engagement, ensuring that it will complement the Lancaster skyline and enhance the character of this section of downtown," Swanson said in the release. "... Gensler's buildings complement the skylines of many of the world's oldest and most historic cities, and they are particularly sensitive to the integration of new structures with historic architecture."

He said Mosaic is to be "architecturally elegant, while timeless in design."