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Business Leaders Get It.

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A sign that Bellevue's big: condominiums are t-i-n-y

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Colorado real estate developer Raymond Tonsing isn't one for living large. And he's willing to bet there are some Bellevue residents for whom less is more, too.

Tonsing, CEO of Tonsing Properties LLC, spent a recent summer living — happily, he says — in a 325-square-foot apartment in downtown Vancouver, British Columbia.

"I was there to figure out how I would function in a smaller space," Tonsing said. "It didn't bother me at all. I would come up to sleep, type on the computer at my desk."

What Tonsing saved on rent, he was able to spend eating out and socializing with friends. He said the experience convinced him that other budget-conscious people might also be willing to trade space for a desirable location.

Tonsing plans to build Vida, a 12-story, 240-unit condominium tower in downtown Bellevue in which some of the studios will be as small as 400 square feet — roughly the size of nine Ping-Pong tables — and priced at about \$275,000.

The lot, slightly less than an acre at 11011 N.E. 9th St., was sold to Tonsing by Alliance Residential Co., which had planned to build a mid-rise apartment project on the site. Currently occupied by a small house built in 1952, the property is located across from The Bravern, where Microsoft and retailer Neiman Marcus have leased space.

A living space of 400 square feet is about one-sixth the size of the average American house, but not all the project's units will be quite that small. Vida condos will average 650 square feet, with most priced between \$350,000 and \$450,000.

That's still pretty small by Bellevue standards. Other nearby condo projects — while they may have some smaller, more affordable units — aim primarily at the luxury end of the market. For example, the European Tower a few blocks away will have 2,200-square-foot units, with prices ranging up to \$10 million.

Bellevue's Vida tower will target young professionals with small units more typical of big cities than suburbia.



H+dIT RENDERING

The Residences at the Bravern will have some units as large as 5,000 square feet.

The largest condos in Vida will be 850-square-foot, two-bedroom units costing about \$600,000.

"This could be a very astute move on the part of the developer to appeal to a market that is underserved in Bellevue in terms of price point," said Matthew Gardner, a principal at Gardner Johnson LLC, a land use economics company in Seattle.

The median price for a home on the Eastside in May was just under \$530,000, according to the Northwest Multiple Listing Service. The median sales price for a condo was just over \$330,000.

Besides the pricing, Tonsing thinks people will be attracted by the project's convenient location within walking distance of downtown Bellevue office buildings and the transit center.

"I'd rather have two more hours a day to get more work done or exercise or spend time with my wife and kids," Tonsing said. Tonsing is using the same architecture firm that did the 251-unit Moda condominium project in Seattle, H+dIT Collaborative LLC, to de-

sign Vida. Aimed at the more affordable end of the market, Moda made headlines for offering several 296-square-foot units for under \$150,000. The project sold out in less than one week.

H+dIT is collaborating with Huntsman Architecture Group in San Francisco on the interior design for Vida. Condo units will feature an in-line kitchen, a wall storage system and flexible interior panels and doors in place of fixed walls. That way, residents can decide whether they want mini-spaces or a single great room.

Vida is expected to be completed by 2010.

Tonsing's firm is partnering on the \$100 million condo project with Denver-based ProNet Capital LLC. ProNet is a private financial services company serving professional athletes, entertainers and other high net-worth individuals. Several Puget Sound area athletes, including basketball star Shawn Kemp, will be investing in the Bellevue project, said ProNet Capital partner Matt McDonald.

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