



Tower owners hope bike hub will attract office tenants

Amenities - The proposed 15-story building would offer a unique facility to thousands of bicyclists

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The nation's biggest office space owner figures Portland is just a bikers' kinda town.

Equity Office Properties Trust has said it plans to make a first-floor "bike hub" a central part of its sales efforts for a new \$100 million, 15-story downtown tower. The owners started marketing the project this week, describing their aim for a regional bike facility grander than anything Portland has seen.

They're still highlighting the traditional kind of perks you'd expect in pricey high-rises, such as Mount Hood views, a plush lobby and underground parking. But it's the 3,000-square-foot bike hub that could make the building unique among Portland office locales.

"You just don't know what it is in your bag of amenities that's going to hook somebody," said Scott Madsen, a broker with Capacity Commercial Group. "I think it's smart on their part to play off of that."

The idea is that, as thousands of bicycle commuters zip into downtown from the Hawthorne Bridge, the riders should have a place to park a bike for the day, get help with a leaky tire and find a shower. It seems like the perfect fit for a major gateway to downtown: With nearly 5,000 bicyclists crossing the bridge each day, the spot is probably the most heavily trafficked bike commuter route in the state.

The hub would offer more than just the few outdoor bike racks and few dozen indoor bicycle parking spaces all new office buildings in Portland are required to provide, said Kevin Mulhall, vice president of development for Equity Office. The company wants to create an amenity that bike commuters throughout downtown would be able to use.

"There are a fair number of high-powered decision-makers that ride their bikes to work," Mulhall said. "This is a way of life in Portland and the Pacific Northwest, that people are health- and environmentally conscious."

But a few office-space brokers who have looked at the First & Main project said tenants are still likely to consider rent and other factors above the fact that there's a bike hub.

"On the list of top criteria, it would be well down in the third or maybe even fourth quartile," said Michael Holzgang, a veteran downtown broker with Colliers International.

Nevertheless, some decision-makers may find bike amenities important. Capacity Commercial's Madsen, a broker who filled the 27-story Fox Tower with tenants as it was finished in 2000, said he remembers one small firm of intellectual property lawyers that insisted on renting space with secure bicycle parking.

"We're talking about expensive, high-end, thousand-dollar bikes that they rode," Madsen said. "That surprised me at the time."

On a practical level, the spot planned for the new bike facility would face the Portland Police Bureau's headquarters and city-county jail building -- not the most marketable location for retail outlets. So Equity Office officials said they figured a bike hub would work there, and provide an amenity for future office tenants.

The development of a regional bike facility is not a new idea, and some efforts by the city in the 1990s met with mixed success. But the effort by Equity Office, the largest owner of office space in the Portland area and nationwide, adds new life to the concept. It also represents a rare private-sector bet -- without any city or urban renewal financial help -- on the idea that businesses might be attracted to buildings that offer

substantial bicycle amenities.

With help from federal transportation money, the city of Portland in the mid-90s established five locations called "Bike Central," coupled with pre-existing lockers at private gyms. The program dwindled after it lost marketing dollars, said Roger Geller, bicycle transportation coordinator for the Portland Office of Transportation. Only two gyms continue to participate.

Surveys conducted by the nonprofit Bicycle Transportation Alliance showed many downtown workers wanted facilities located within five blocks of their offices, said Evan Manvel, executive director of the group. Many downtown buildings include bicycle parking and some access to showers, which provides some convenience for bike commuters.

But many bike commuters -- especially novices -- find navigating narrow downtown streets intimidating, Manvel said. So providing a place near the Willamette River for bike storage and lockers would enable them to park there and walk the last few blocks to their offices.

"Putting it at the base of the Hawthorne Bridge is the right way to go," Manvel said.

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