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Sky-high tower on sale minus council consent

An Auckland developer is planning to build an apartment block that would be the second highest structure in the country after the Sky Tower, if the Auckland City Council gives it a building consent.

But the fact that the development has not yet been approved has not stopped developer Sanctuary Group from selling the apartments to investors off the plans.

Sanctuary plans to build the 45-level Saffron apartment block on the site of a currently vacant low rise building at 51-53 Albert St in the CBD. The new building will rise to a height of 155m and, because it is being built on a ridge, it will tower above other high rise buildings in the CBD.

But it is also likely to be controversial because it will back onto St Patrick's Square, home to the city's Catholic cathedral, and a building of Saffron's height may have adverse impacts on surrounding buildings, such as a loss of sunlight and views and increased wind.

A building application has been lodged for the project as a restricted discretionary activity, but at this stage the council has not drafted a report on the application and is yet to set a date for a planning hearing.

So it is not even certain how long it will be before the development is approved, or not, and if it is, what conditions may apply to it.

However Sanctuary Group has been promoting the development through property promotions company Richmastery.

At a seminar organised by Richmastery last week, the units were being offered for sale through a company called Blue Peak Wealth Management, which is one-third owned by Richmastery founder Phil Jones.

Although the apartments in the project will be larger than so-called "shoe box" apartments which have been a feature of many inner city developments, they will still be compact.

The one-bedroom apartments will have a floor area of 50sq m plus a small balcony, while the two-bedroom apartments will be 65sq m plus a balcony.

The average price of a one-bedroom unit was \$560,000 - over \$100,000 more than the average house price in Auckland - while the two-bedroom units had an average price of \$635,000.

At last week's seminar, Blue Peak director Sean Wood encouraged potential investors to sign sale and purchase agreements for the units on the spot, saying that their price would be increased by 10% the following day, and if investors signed up on the night they would make an immediate capital gain.

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