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## AVRP Skyport Studio's Little Italy projects set for review



**By Mark Armao**

An adjoining pair of mixed-use projects designed by AVRP Skyport Studios is being reviewed by the Civic San Diego Design Review Committee on Wednesday.

Located in Little Italy, the proposed projects would occupy most of the block bounded by Columbia, Hawthorn, State and Grape streets. The projects, which were separated into two parcels to maximize the allowable density, will be reviewed as a combined project by the CivicSD committee.

The nine-story buildings would contain a total of 125 apartments, 78 hotel rooms and around 8,500 square feet of commercial space.

Architecturally, the two sides of the development express a similar massing and material palette, with certain features designed to distinguish the projects from each other.

The northern portion curves along State Street as it parallels Interstate 5. On the western face, ash-white concrete separates the heavily glazed upper levels, which step back from the street.

"It's a terracing piece of sculpture that curves as State turns into Hawthorn," said Douglas H. Austin, chairman and CEO of AVRP Skyport Studios. "It steps down to the west and there's a hill you come down, so it actually makes the project more interesting, I think, because there's a lot of movement visually."

On the southern side of the block, the building assumes a more rectilinear aesthetic, with stacked oriel windows that protrude from rust-colored metal cladding. The rustic finish extends along State Street and wraps around the ground-floor retail spaces.

A multi-level lobby for both the residential and hotel components opens onto the curvilinear corner at State and Hawthorn. A double-height restaurant and bar space attached to the hotel will serve as the project's chief commercial component.

The northern portion of the project contains 22 hotel rooms, while the southern block holds 56 hotel rooms.

It is unclear whether the developer - a subsidiary of San Diego-based Liberty National Corp. - will develop the hospitality segment as a single hotel or divide the rooms between two brands.

The developer could not immediately be reached for comment.

The residential units range in size from one-bedroom units with 500 square feet to three-bedroom units with 1,600 square feet. There are four double-level townhome units that open onto State Street, and a single-level townhome on Grape Street.

Austin said the project's combination of residential and hotel space allows for shared amenities, such as food and concierge service. Noting that the trend has caught on with millennials, Austin said he often stays at a residential hotel in Vancouver, where they are called strata hotels.

"You share a lobby and there's a restaurant down at the bottom," he said. "You've got a choice between community and privacy because of the way it's designed, and this project is no different in that sense."

Following the meeting, AVR's drawings may be adjusted in response to the design review committee's feedback. The project will likely undergo its final review next month.

If the project is approved and that decision is subsequently appealed, the appeal would go to the city planning commission. In that case, Austin, who is a member of the planning commission, would recuse himself from the proceedings.