

Top-of- the- Hill revisited

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By **Mike Marcellino**
The Sun Press

CLEVELAND HEIGHTS _ Brendan Ring, owner of the popular Night Town restaurant and jazz spot, believes hip Cedar-Fairmont _ where condos go for \$600,000 _ may become the downtown of University Circle.

Cleveland Heights took a first step toward making Ring's vision come true Monday night. City council agreed to pay Allegro Realty Advisors, Ltd. up to \$40,000 for an analysis and feasibility study of the Top-of-the-Hill development site at Euclid Heights Boulevard and Cedar Road.

The study will consider the city-owned land in the context of the Cedar-Fairmont area. And it could include a creative way of making the area more pedestrian friendly.

Grand visions for the site aren't new. The city has eyed this hillside overlooking downtown Cleveland for development three times and as far back as 1972. Proposals were considered in 1972 and 1982 on a then 2.14-acre city-owned site and again in 1990 on 3.32 acres. Nothing happened. The city now owns five acres, serving as a parking lot adjacent to Night Town.

This Top-of-the-Hill vision, as seen by Chris Ronayne, University Circle Inc. president, is a fight against further out migration.

University Circle has plenty of commercial and cultural organizations and jobs to fuel Top-of-the-Hill and a downtown University Circle.

Thirty thousand cars wind up the hill every day, most of them to Cleveland Heights.

Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals, Louis Stokes Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Case Western Reserve University, world-class cultural institutions and others employ 40,000 people. In the next 10 years there could be 10,000 more new jobs. One thousand new housing units will be needed, Ronayne adds.

Mayor Ed Kelley and City Manager Robert Downey say the city wants to hit a home run with the Top-of-the-Hill development or do nothing at all. Kelley describes the site as one of the most sought after in Greater Cleveland. He cautions that the development analysis is putting the city's toe in the water_ just the beginning of a long process.

This time the city's timing may be right. Cleveland Heights is on an economic and residential development roll with \$350 million worth of projects since 1997.

The Allegro analysis will involve community groups like the Cedar-Fairmont merchants and Future Heights. Top-of-the-Hill could out-do Legacy Village and Crocker Park, two upscale retail centers, by not only having retail and commercial but a strong housing component.

Restaurant owner Ring emphasizes that the analysis of Top-of-the-Hill should be done in concert with input from both Cedar Fairmont and University Circle.

It's about time, Ring says about the city's action. The area desperately needs a hotel, he adds, as well as a greater variety of shops, more restaurants and boutiques.