



# DESIGNING A TRUE URBAN EXPERIENCE

GS&P's Joe Bucher says Nashville Yards will offer a variety of scale, spaces, street-level aesthetics

BY WILLIAM WILLIAMS

**J**oe Bucher serves as a principal with Nashville-based Gresham Smith + Partners, the architecture, urban planning and engineering firm working on downtown's massive mixed-use project Nashville Yards.

Working closely with Nashville Yards master developer Southwest Value Partners, Bucher is overseeing GS&P's efforts on what could be a 10-building undertaking with a collective price tag of at least \$1 billion. It's a major challenge,

one that could require up to 10 years of work and that the urban planning expert embraces.

*Post Managing Editor William Williams spoke with Bucher about the development.*

One of the key questions many folks have involves the Nashville Yards property located north of the Church Street viaduct and adjacent to the YMCA building. It fronts 10th Avenue and faces west. I understand that, after some discussion, you now envision one office tower for that specific site. How will that tower effectively connect to the main segment of Nashville Yards given the challenge of the fact that the viaduct spans 10th Avenue?

In its current condition, the viaduct is problematic for pedestrian and vehicular access. With Nashville Yards, we strive to create a walkable urban community. That's why we are introducing a new concept to Nashville: a "double decker," or stacked, street. The future Upper 10th Plaza will connect the viaduct to all the Nashville Yards buildings planned for the Church Street corridor. The elevated state of Church Street will be Level 1 of the proposed structures, and this new plaza street will create a seamless and walkable experience at that upper level.

We are also planning a series of creative office buildings for the south side of Church Street. The tower shown in the renderings of the north side of Church Street is still flexible based on the potential user. Zoning is nearly unlimited.

On this theme, will the future buildings that hug the viaduct offer vehicular and pedestrian access from that structure?

All buildings along Church Street will seamlessly border the viaduct, creating a continuous sidewalk system and eliminating any feel that it is a "bridge." Upper 10th Plaza will directly access the viaduct through a signal intersection that allows vehicular flow to and from the development. It is also worth noting that the viaduct at Church Street is roughly equal to the viaduct on Broadway [in terms of orientation]. This allows for the creation of an elevated boardwalk along the western edge of Nashville Yards that will serve as a pedestrian walkway from Church Street to Broadway.

I would think 10th Avenue will be the key street at Nashville Yards, with Ninth Avenue and Commerce Street taking a slight back seat. Broadway will offer only the Hyatt Regency within the footprint but it will be a key

street for Nashville Yards regardless. Church Street could be the “wild card.” How would you describe the future significance of the streets?

Each of the streets that connect to or intersect Nashville Yards has been thoughtfully designed with consideration for the streets’ history, use and purpose.

Broadway is integral to Nashville, as it is the street many consider the heart of the city’s entertainment and tourism district. It made sense to put the Hyatt Regency hotel there while taking advantage of an opportunity to fix and improve the 10th Avenue intersection. Nashville Yards will maximize Broadway to efficiently feed both pedestrian and vehicular traffic into the development.

Originally known as Spring Street, Church Street is at the center of the original plan for the city of Nashville. It remains the artery into the heart of the central business district, which is why the Nashville Yards development will feature new office buildings along this corridor. Additionally, Church Street has historically been considered one of the best streets in Nashville. It was a hub for urban shopping, hospitality and theaters. With the launch of its mixed-use entertainment district at Nashville Yards, AEG will bring theater, music and cultural arts back to this area of town.

Commerce Street will be vastly improved due to Nashville Yards. The future Commerce Street will link all of the good progress underway at the Fifth + Broadway site and the new federal courthouse project to Nashville Yards. We will activate and improve the street, and the terminus will be a fantastic piazza space between our buildings that leads to the new park and green space next to the railroad tracks.

**At what intersection, street segment, etc. — in other words, at what location within Nashville Yards’ public realm/outdoor spaces — will people feel like they are truly in Nashville and, conversely, in a place very unlike Nashville circa 2018?**

The public outdoor spaces that we are creating at Nashville Yards will align nicely with the charm and history of Nashville, while also offering a fresh take on modern urban living. We have been thoughtful in the material selection throughout the development to harken back to the railyards and historic Nashville architecture without mimicking the forms. Nashville Yards will feature urban piazzas that are more reminiscent of European spaces than those currently found in



Joe Bucher

Nashville but, through materiality and scale, will still feel sincere and authentically Nashville.

**One of the concerns about Nashville Yards is that it might offer, despite its striking cosmopolitan vibe and energy-efficient buildings, a somewhat sterile and excessively uniform feel. If, for example, all the sidewalks are of the same width, all the buildings are of the same design style and all the ancillary elements (landscaping, signage, street lights, bike racks, etc.) are coordinated to offer a matched presentation ... that could yield 15 acres of built fabric exhibiting minimal, if any, level of organic evolution. If there will be no quirkiness or grittiness, Nashville Yards’ “persona” will need to derive from other elements. Thoughts?**

There’s no doubt Nashville Yards is a coordinated effort. Much of the coordination is based around a commitment to create a large-scale development that feels cohesive but never monotonous. Our goal has been to create variety and delight throughout the development using a few different methods.

First, from a master-planning standpoint, we have focused on creating a variety of scale of spaces — meaning we have integrated some lower-rise buildings with some taller towers, helping to ensure pedestrians don’t feel overwhelmed. Nashville Yards will feature everything from one-story object build-

ings nestled in a park-like setting to 30-story glass towers. We also broke the block plan into smaller chunks than the current superblock planning model. This will create a finer, human-scaled granularity, allowing secondary passages to cut through the development and connect more points — much like is found in an old city — limiting long, interrupted facades.

Second, we know the ground floor and ground plane are the most important elements to encourage vibrancy in a development; these are base buildings at eyeline with pedestrians and they shape visitors’ perception of the environment. That’s why the first two floors of every building in Nashville Yards will have a huge variety of façade treatments, opening variability and encouraging fresh and interesting landscaping elements. We have incorporated historic materials in a variety of forms to give everything a sense of texture from up close, preventing glass towers from dominating the street. We intend to create layers of texture, intrigue and grit through the careful curation of first-class retail tenants, environmental graphics and signage elements, and lush greenery and landscaping throughout the entire project.

Third, we’ve deliberately alternated the size and width of sidewalks throughout Nashville Yards, creating a rich and engaging pedestrian experience. Sidewalks will spill into larger open spaces surrounded by courtyards of outdoor dining spaces and multiple levels, providing pedestrians with an enjoyable, meandering pathway through the heart of the project and along double-sided outdoor retail streets.

Finally, we have tried very hard to incorporate distinctive aesthetics to the different buildings. The office towers may be all glass — because that is what the market desires — but we intentionally gave them “movement” and offset floors to react to the kinetic nature of the railroad. The residential buildings are more solid, with balconies that protrude outward toward the green spaces. AEG’s future venue will be a low-rise building integrating elevated exterior space that aligns nicely with Nashville’s entertainment scene. The Hyatt Regency hotel will be a beacon and central entry point to the city, so we gave it a monumental sheer façade.

There is a concerted effort to ensure a level of continuity throughout Nashville Yards, but we also have worked to create a variety of building forms and styles to encourage interest and intrigue. Once experienced, Nashville Yards will offer a rich, multi-faceted urban experience with grit, charm and a cosmopolitan edge. **NP**