

# A NEW KIND OF CONDO

## Shipping containers get recycled for residences

By John Gallagher  
Free Press Business Writer

House hunters will soon be able to check out what may be the most unusual condominium project in metro Detroit — a 20-unit complex near Wayne State University built from empty shipping containers.

A model unit and sales center will break ground in mid-December on Michigan Avenue west of downtown. Three stories tall, the center will let potential buyers see just how innovative shipping container architecture can be, said Leslie Horn, CEO of Three Squared, the Detroit-based firm that is building the project.

First proposed in 2008, the shipping-container condo project known as Exceptional Green Living on Rosa Parks stalled in the national real estate crash, but is now back on target for a 2013 construction start, Horn said this week.

The \$3.4-million project would stack empty containers four high, cut in windows and doors, install plumbing, stairways and heating, and add amenities such as balconies and landscaped patios.

Horn said the condo units would range in size from 850 to 1,920 square feet. Prices are still being determined but should

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run about 5% less than similarly sized condos in today's market, she said. Steven Flum, a Detroit-based architect, designed the project.

Meanwhile, the two-unit model center off Michigan Avenue will cost \$350,000 to build and break ground in mid-December, Horn said.

Horn admitted that many people find the concept

strange.

"Even last week I met with some investors and one of them said, 'I'd rather invest after you have one built.' I think part of it is education," she said. "People still have a stigma because they don't see the versatility in container construction."

Empty shipping containers have been used extensively in Europe to create not only housing but projects like office space for entrepreneurs and other types of projects. But their use is much rarer in the U.S.

But backers of such projects say that it's a good way to recycle empty containers, which tend to stack up in port cities around the world because shippers find it too expensive to send them back empty to China or other ports of origin.

If successful, the prototype project in Detroit could lead to widespread other uses of empty containers, Horn said, including student or emergency housing, temporary construction offices, and infill houses in urban neighborhoods.

Horn is already looking ahead to similar projects in other cities. She added, "We believe it's just the beginning of the capacity of our company."

*For information on the project, go to the company's website at [www.threesquaredinc.com](http://www.threesquaredinc.com).*

■ CONTACT JOHN GALLAGHER: 313-222-5173





MOSES HARRIS/Detroit Free Press



The shipping container condo is being developed by Three Squared and designed by Detroit architect Steven Flum.



The \$3.4-million project would stack empty containers four high and cut in windows and doors.



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**Leslie Horn, CEO of Three Squared, stands in the empty lot along Michigan Avenue in the historic Corktown neighborhood in Detroit, where her company plans to build a model unit called Our Mission Avenue Model Center. Three stories tall, the center will let potential buyers see just how innovative shipping container architecture can be, Horn said. If successful, the prototype project in Detroit could lead to widespread other uses of empty containers, Horn said.**