

StonebridgeCarras launches \$150M project



Daniel J. Sernovitz, Staff Reporter

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StonebridgeCarras broke ground Monday on a 345,000-square-foot spec development in the District's NoMa neighborhood.

Is there such a thing as a Field of Dreams for commercial real estate developers? **Douglas Firstenberg** thinks so, and he's betting \$150 million on it.

Firstenberg and his Bethesda-based StonebridgeCarras LLC broke ground Monday on a 345,000-square-foot spec office building in the District's NoMa neighborhood. But Firstenberg said he's confident 3 Constitution Square is "speculative" — meaning without tenants signed on to lease space or pay rent — only in a technical sense. As he sees it, the only question is whether the building will fill up with private tenants or federal agencies.

"We think it's going to be a fun competition to see which it is," the founding principal of StonebridgeCarras said in an interview. "Obviously our view is there's little development going on right now, and we're pretty excited about a project delivery in late 2013."

The building StonebridgeCarras and partner **Walton Street Capital LLC** broke ground on Monday will be the third office building to go up in Constitution Square, which also includes a Harris Teeter supermarket, retail and residential development.



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Dignitaries at Monday's event included Del. **Eleanor Holmes Norton**, D-D.C., who praised the developers for going ahead with a speculative development given the uncertain economic environment, and Robin-Eve Jasper, founding member president of the NoMa Business Improvement District.

"I thank you for doing it on spec without any assurance in this market either in the federal government or the private sector," Norton said. "It shows that in NoMa, if you build it, they will come."

StonebridgeCarras has retained **Cassidy Turley** to market the space to prospective tenants, and broker **Darian LeBlanc** said he is confident that 2013 will bring a stronger real estate market for the building's completion. Among other things, he noted there are nearly 2,000 residential units under construction in the neighborhood, and with built-in prospective employees, NoMa will be a strong sell for companies looking for workers.

Residences are also on Firstenberg's mind, as StonebridgeCarras is planning to break ground by the end of the year on a \$150 million residential development in Bethesda to feature for-sale condominiums.

Daniel J. Sernovitz covers commercial real estate.