

225 Baronne office building to become hotel, apartments and garage



Advocate photo by VERONICA DOMINACH-- 225 Baronne Street, Tuesday, July9, 2013.

225 Baronne office high-rise to become boutique hotel, apartments

By Jaquetta White

jwhite@theadvocate.com

After sitting empty for nearly a decade, the first major building constructed in the Central Business District after World War II and one of New Orleans' first high-rise structures is undergoing a renovation into a boutique hotel and apartments.

Construction workers began asbestos abatement and internal demolition work late last month on 225 Baronne St., a 30-story former office tower at Baronne and Gravier streets. The 550,000-square-foot building is being turned into 192 residential apartments, a 188-room Aloft Hotel and a 356-space public parking

garage.

Renovation of the 51-year-old building is expected to be completed in December 2014.

HRI Properties, which bought the structure in May 2013, said Thursday that it has closed on \$100 million in financing to complete the building's conversion.

The local developer specializes in the adaptive reuse of historic buildings. It has had a hand in the development of the American Can Apartments, Blue Plate Artist Lofts and Federal City and is currently working on projects related to the redevelopment of the Iberville public housing complex.

At one time, 225 Baronne was one of the pre-eminent office buildings in New Orleans, housing offices for both Boeing and Chrysler. Additionally, both the British and Canadian consulates, the law firm of Jones, Walker, Waechter and oil firms including Tidewater, Shell, Mobil, Gulf and British American once all occupied full floors in the building.

The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its role in helping to maintain New Orleans' downtown economy as people and businesses began moving to the suburbs in the 1960s.

However, it has been vacant since Hurricane Katrina.

"Just as this building in 1962 asserted the viability of downtown New Orleans in an era when other cities were abandoning their historic centers, the redevelopment of 225 Baronne continues HRI's mission of adaptive reuse of historic properties in city centers," Josh Collen, HRI's vice president of development, said in a statement. "A new life for this building will lead to the elimination of blight along the Baronne corridor, bringing the revitalized, healthy core of the CBD toward Loyola Avenue."

HRI received approval from the City Planning Commission and City Council this year to transform the building's second through tenth floors into a garage, and permission to demolish an adjacent two-story structure at 919 Gravier St. That site will become the entrance to the parking garage.

HRI said the project will create 300 construction jobs and 76 permanent hotel jobs.

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