

## CITY

# MAKING PROGRESS

## Cliffbreakers, Amerock redevelopments underway

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ROCKFORD — The work to give Cliffbreakers a \$2.5 million facelift has begun on the city's northwest side.

The redevelopment started in June and is being covered by a city-backed HUD Section 108 loan in the amount of \$3 million. According to a news release from Rock River Bridge Hotel LLC and Aries Capital, the project will make improvements while preserving amenities that made the facility a premier restaurant, hotel and conference center.

The long-awaited project was delayed after a New's Year's Eve shooting took the life of a Wisconsin man. The incident prompted city leaders to revisit Cliffbreakers' security plan as it was the second gun-related incident in recent months.

"It's time for us to freshen our face and give the hotel and ballrooms a much more contemporary look, while keeping its captivating old-world structural decor," Aries President Neil Freeman said.

Freeman said improvements will be made inside and outside the facility, including a new bar, carpeting, lighting and decking.

"We're excited to see Cliffbreakers advance their construction," Mayor Tom McNamara said Tuesday. "It's a long-standing asset on our northwest side."

The project is the first since the property went into foreclosure in 2012. The upgrade is expected to be completed in February.

• **A few miles down river**, workers are prepping the exterior of the Amerock building, the downtown space tapped as a 150-plus room Embassy Suites by Wisconsin-based developer Gorman & Company.

Crews began Monday removing loose concrete to prepare the building for inspection, the mayor's office said. Amerock had become a project littered with delays as the economic landscape and capital stack for the \$77 million facility changed.

Don Bissell, a founding member of Friends of the Ziock Building (FOZ), laid the initial groundwork for the hotel, landing the building on National Register of Historic Places. From there, FOZ courted a number of developers. Gorman came to the table with the best plan.

"This started with a lunch meeting at Octane," Bissell said Tuesday. "And that

meeting, of course, led to others with Gorman and their team. We've been able to work very closely with them over the course of this."

Bissell says he's happy with the look of the final project, one that took shape over a number of years and changes. One involved a full-service Amtrak station complete with an attached parking deck. Those plans were nixed when Gov. Bruce Rauner killed the funding for the Amtrak proposal in 2015.

Bissell believes even without the train, seeing the project move forward means a major step in downtown's redevelopment.

"We think this is all pretty spectacular. There's been a lot of work that'll start showing itself over the next couple years. The whole waterfront will look different in a couple years."

Gorman and city officials were in a race against the clock to see the building grandfathered in under a set of historical tax credits set to expire at the end of this year. The state legislature has re-certified that tax credit program, but it's still waiting for a signature on Rauner's desk.

A vote in the final days of Mayor Larry Morrisey's administration gave Gorman the green light to go ahead with the hotel. The developer secured financing last week that allowed preliminary work to begin Monday.

The mayor's office had said they had little concern over the timeline of the project. "If it gets to October and nothing's been done, then I'll start to have some worries," Mayor McNamara told The Times in a conversation earlier this month.

Bissell adds that any concerns he had about working with Gorman were put to bed over the duration of the project coming together.

"I come from a big company—a big industry, the aerospace industry. This is one of the most professional groups I've ever seen assembled to a person," Bissell commented. "We've seen their work on a number of projects in Milwaukee. We've been very impressed."

Gorman hopes to start turning dirt this fall. The total rebuild is expected to last two years and create hundreds of construction jobs. R.

**Right: Crews began work Monday removing excess concrete on the exterior of the former Amerock building, site of a planned 150-room downtown hotel.** Photo, Don Bissell

