

Developers Plan to Breathe New Life Into Vacant Philly Buildings (Published on PhillyLiving)

Throughout Philadelphia, developers are planning to renovate historic buildings and rejuvenate neglected areas of the city. While some plan to build luxury apartments or condos to boost the city's economy, a few aim to help low-income families, or even end homelessness.

West Philadelphia High School

In West Philadelphia, an empty high school may soon get a much needed facelift. Strong Place Partners hope to convert the old West Philadelphia High School building into an apartment complex aimed at grad students and junior faculty at nearby universities. The 100-year-old building was abandoned last year when the school moved to a new location. Strong Place Partners' plans would retain most of the school's original infrastructure in hopes of preserving its character. Last week's vote on the proposed renovation did not reach a resolution, but many neighborhood residents look forward to the new development.

The Divine Lorraine Hotel

The Divine Lorraine Hotel was once a significant symbol of equality and hope to the residents of North Philadelphia. In October, the building was purchased by developer Eric Blumenfeld, who plans to convert it into 126 apartments, 25 of which would be leased at subsidized rates for low-income tenants. In 1894, Lorraine Apartments was Philadelphia's first high-rise luxury apartment building. In 1948, Reverend Major Jealous Divine purchased the building and renamed it the Divine Lorraine Hotel. The Reverend used the hotel to provide his followers with affordable housing, jobs, and free food, and made it the first racially-integrated hotel in the country. The building has since fallen into disrepair, but Blumenfeld hopes to begin renovations as early as 2013.

The North Broad Corridor

In the growing neighborhood of Francisville, construction is underway for JBJ Soul Homes, a housing development which will cater to low-income families. Members of the Greater Exodus Baptist Church have spent the last decade purchasing all of the derelict houses on the North Broad corridor and demolishing them to make way for the new development, which is being funded by Project HOME and contributions from musician Jon Bon Jovi and the Middleton Family. 40 of the development's 55 units will be used to house homeless individuals. The contributors hope that JBJ Soul Homes will help to one day end homelessness in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia's neighborhoods are growing and changing, thanks to developers who cherish the city's past and look toward a bright future. Renovation projects all over Philadelphia are restoring glory to historic buildings, or creating brand new developments to breathe new life into the city.

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