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WORK IN PROGRESS

Redevelopers of Former Brewery Getting Set for Last Call

By Kay Metcalfe

THE OLD HAFFENREFFER BREWERY IS SITUATED in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston. The 19th century brick building, which ceased brewing beer in 1965, is nearing its transformation into a small-business center that will serve and strengthen the urban community it calls home.

The 16-building, five-acre complex was purchased by the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corp. in 1983 for \$350,000 with the intention of redeveloping the site into a business center that would empower and increase the diversity and sustainability of the community.

"People thought we were crazy then and now [the price is] a steal," said Andy Waxman, project developer for JPND. The building project is JPND's first in its 29-year history, during which time the organization has worked hard at developing affordable housing, running workforce development programs and organizing ways to better the community.

The project is a 150,000-square-foot complex that was two-thirds developed in the mid-1990s. The space is selling for \$20 per square foot, with an expected project cost of \$11 million. Waxman explained that the remaining portion of the redevelopment, known as the Main Block, poised a more difficult task, and at the time was considered too difficult and even impossible to renovate. Uneven floors, cavernous rooms and concrete walls measuring several feet thick in some places combined to create a complex and problematical situation for anyone trying to meet today's building codes.

The Main Block is made up of eight buildings, labeled D through K alphabetically, with Building D the only one that has yet to be developed. The redevelopment of the Main Block, minus Building D, was phase one.

"We have done the core work of phase one,



The former Haffenreffer Brewery in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood is being redeveloped into a small-business center. The property is owned by the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corp., which hopes work on the project's final phase will begin by the end of 2006.

but are still filling tenant space," said Waxman. A dance studio, cafe and gymnasium were recently added to the roster, which also includes some light industrial tenants.

The original buildings were constructed between 1870 and 1920, and Waxman said that others were added as they were needed, which explains the complicated layout of the original structure. "There were 4-foot drops between some buildings ... It was a big design challenge," he added.

"Old buildings require a new set of skills [compared] to dealing with new buildings. It took a month just to be able to construct a mental understanding of the layout. [There had

to be] level changes because you can't have spaces with only stair access. We had to connect levels [and] raise floors - it was very clever," said Stephen Baker, principal of Boston-based Baker/Wohl Architects. The general contractor for the project is Commodore Builders, which is based in Newton.

'It Was a Challenge'

After the completion of phase one, only one elevator and one chairlift were installed in the Main Block. All of the other uneven flooring was fixed with ramps and re-leveling of space.

Continued on Next Page

Continued from Previous Page

A lot of demolition was required to accomplish the final layout of the Main Block due to the walls and floors, explained Baker. The project team had to cut through concrete, brick and overcome the hurdle of the vaulted floors and high ceilings.

The 10,000-square-foot second phase needs financing before construction can begin. Following the purchase of the complex the JPNDC put the brewery on the National Register of Historic Places, so specific rules are required in maintaining certain aspects of the structure.

"A lot of windows needed to be added and a lot of work needs to be done to get everything passed," said Waxman.

The JPNDC received state and federal historic tax credits for the redevelopment of the first phase, and are hoping to receive more to help in the redevelopment of the second. The organization hopes work will begin on phase two by the end of the year.

"We are dependent on getting more tax credits for phase two. The mission is to help local businesses [and] without the tax credit this wouldn't be possible," said Baker. "The major permitting hurdle is passed ... Phase two is going to be easier than phase one. It was difficult in getting the permitting authority to understand [the complex before] and now it's smoother – the building makes sense."

"We had to put a lot of work into it before [we] could begin. It was a challenge," said Jen-

nifer Pinck, president of Boston-based construction management consulting firm Pinck & Co., who managed the construction process for JPNDC and coordinated the work of the architect and the contractor.

"The interior looks rough, [which was] intentional. We wanted to preserve the industrial sense of the building; [we wanted] to reflect its nature as an industrial complex, and hope that the design fits that character," said Baker.

"We totally utilized the asset and turned it into something good for the community. At the end of the day it's the revitalization of the community that counts; neighbors were coming up to us and saying thanks," said Lauren Larson, director of marketing for Commodore Builders. ■

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