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Originally Published: March 28, 2013 12:31 PM Modified: March 29, 2013 7:10 AM

David Whitney Building to reopen July 2014 after renovations

By Ryan Felton

When the **David Whitney Building** reopens next year, it will feature a new bar and garden lounge on the ground floor as well as easy access to the **Detroit People Mover** and, when completed, the M-1 light rail.

Local economic developers and government officials Thursday marked the beginning of renovations of the long-closed building on Woodward in downtown Detroit, which is expected to reopen in July 2014.

The announcement comes nearly two years after plans first emerged to renovate the 98-year-old David Burnham-designed building into a mixed-use facility featuring a boutique hotel, apartments and ground-floor retail.

Whitney Partners LLC, a joint venture of **The Roxbury Group** in Detroit and Farmington Hills-based hotel investment firm **Trans Inns Management Inc.**, received \$8 million from the Michigan Strategic Fund in January, giving the long-in-the-making, \$82.5 million project enough money for the redevelopment, which includes construction of a 136-room Aloft Hotel and 108 one- and two-bedroom apartments.

Whitney Partners purchased the 19-story building in March 2011 for \$3.3 million.

Besides plans for the **Aloft Detroit at The David Whitney** hotel, which is part of the **Sherwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc.** chain, renovations will include the edgy hotel brand's WXYZ bar and "re: mix lounge" on the ground floor of the building.



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David Di Rita, principal of The Roxbury Group, speaks Thursday in the David Whitney Building while (from left) Matt Elliott, Michigan state president for Bank of America; David Blaszkiewicz, president and CEO of the Downtown Detroit Partnership; George Jackson, president and CEO of the Detroit Economic Growth Corp., and Gov. Rick Snyder listen about plans for the downtown building.

A 24-hour fitness center will be constructed as well as 10,000 square feet of meeting and banquet space on the second floor.

Redevelopment will also include restoration of the interior finishes and renovation of the building's roof-top sign. The building's atrium will contain a garden lounge and second floor access to the **Grand Circus Park Detroit People Mover Station**, which will be reopened.

Gov. Rick Snyder; George Jackson, president and CEO of the **Detroit Economic Growth Corp.**; David Blaszkiewicz, president and CEO of the **Downtown Detroit Partnership**; Matt Elliott, Michigan state president for **Bank of America**; and David Di Rita, principal of **The Roxbury Group**, each addressed the crowd of about 75 people before a tour around the second floor of the building.

Blaszkiewicz said the building, with its central location, will serve as a "hub" for transportation in the downtown district.

The 3.3-mile M-1 light-rail project, on which construction is expected to begin later this year, will feed transit riders into the Detroit People Mover line. Both transit systems will have stops at **Grand Circus Park**, where the David Whitney Building is located.

DEGC's Jackson then joked with the crowd that he had nothing to talk about because Blaszkiewicz already had said everything.

"I remember when we had nothing to talk about," Jackson joked. "I'm loving this. This project didn't happen overnight."

The project – which received a \$1 million **Michigan Community Revitalization Program** performance-based grant and a \$7.5 million performance-based loan – is expected to create 75 full-time jobs, the state announced.

Whitney Partners was one of 14 companies to receive a total of \$1.1 billion from the **Michigan Strategic Fund**. That total state investment is expected to create close to 4,600 jobs, the state said.

Financial support for the renovation of the building at 1553 Woodward Ave., first constructed in 1915, also came from Bank of America; the **Detroit Downtown Development Authority**; Detroit Economic Growth Corp.; **Invest Detroit**; **Michigan Historic Preservation Network**; the **Michigan Strategic Fund** and a combination of historic, brownfield and new market tax credits.



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The ornate lobby of the 98-year-old David Burnham-designed David Whitney Building in downtown Detroit.