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ALERT TOP STORY

Developers eyeing more housing in downtown Hammond after Bank Calumet redevelopment

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Developers are eyeing more housing projects in downt

The City of Hammond has been fielding interest from developers in more downtown housing projects following the success of the \$30 million redevelopment of the Bank Calumet headquarters into the Banc apartments, Hammond Executive Director of Planning and Development Anne Taylor said. NWI Development Group and other developers new to the city have expressed interest in repurposing buildings downtown to add more apartments.

"Developers are touring sites," she said. "We're continuously doing tours. There's interest with the housing shortage, the new construction and the train station coming downtown."

The Hammond Redevelopment Commission owns a handful of buildings downtown it could potentially sell to developers, including the Hotel LaSalle building on Hohman Avenue.

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Hammond recently overhauled the infrastructure downtown after bringing in the renowned urban planner Jeff Speck. It narrowed Hohman Avenue to two lanes to slow down the traffic passing through, added parking in the median and widened the sidewalks to encourage more pedestrian activity.

"There's been interest in redevelopment since it was master-planned to slow down the traffic," Taylor said. "It's been very encouraging to see."

Downtown Hammond was long a bustling destination filled with movie palaces like the Paramount and Parthenon Theaters and grand department stores like E.C. Minas and Goldblatt's, which was forever immortalized in the classic film "A Christmas Story" that was penned by Hammond native Jean Shepherd. It has declined since the 1970s and has suffered further setbacks in recent years, including the exodus of many of the law firms that once clustered around the federal and county courts once electronic filing was allowed.

The last few years have been up and down for downtown Hammond.

The 800,000-square-foot, 226-bed Franciscan hospital, long an economic anchor and employment center downtown, was closed. Hammond demolished historic buildings that fell into disrepair, including the Hammond National Insurance Co. and the former Elks Lodge at 142 Rimbach St. The Diocese of Gary is looking to close St. Joseph Catholic Church, the oldest religious institution in the city of Hammond.

Longtime retailer It's Just Serendipity, whose owner Karen Maravilla has been one of downtown Hammond's biggest civic boosters over the years, is closing and moving to Highland due to the toll e-commerce took on the vintage and antique store.

However, the downtown also is seeing new sparks of life. The Paradise Mototiki coffee shop, tiki bar and food-fired pizzeria recently opened and draws huge crowds for its car nights, bringing new life to a downtown many complain often feels like a ghost town. Purdue University Northwest plans to open the Roberts Impact Lab for quantum commercialization.

A new South Shore Line station is coming and expected to drive demand for more housing for people commuting from Chicago.

Developers interested in historic preservation have since been meticulously reviving the historic century-old, 112-foot-tall Bank Calumet building in downtown Hammond into 100 apartments with views of the Chicago skyline from the sixth to

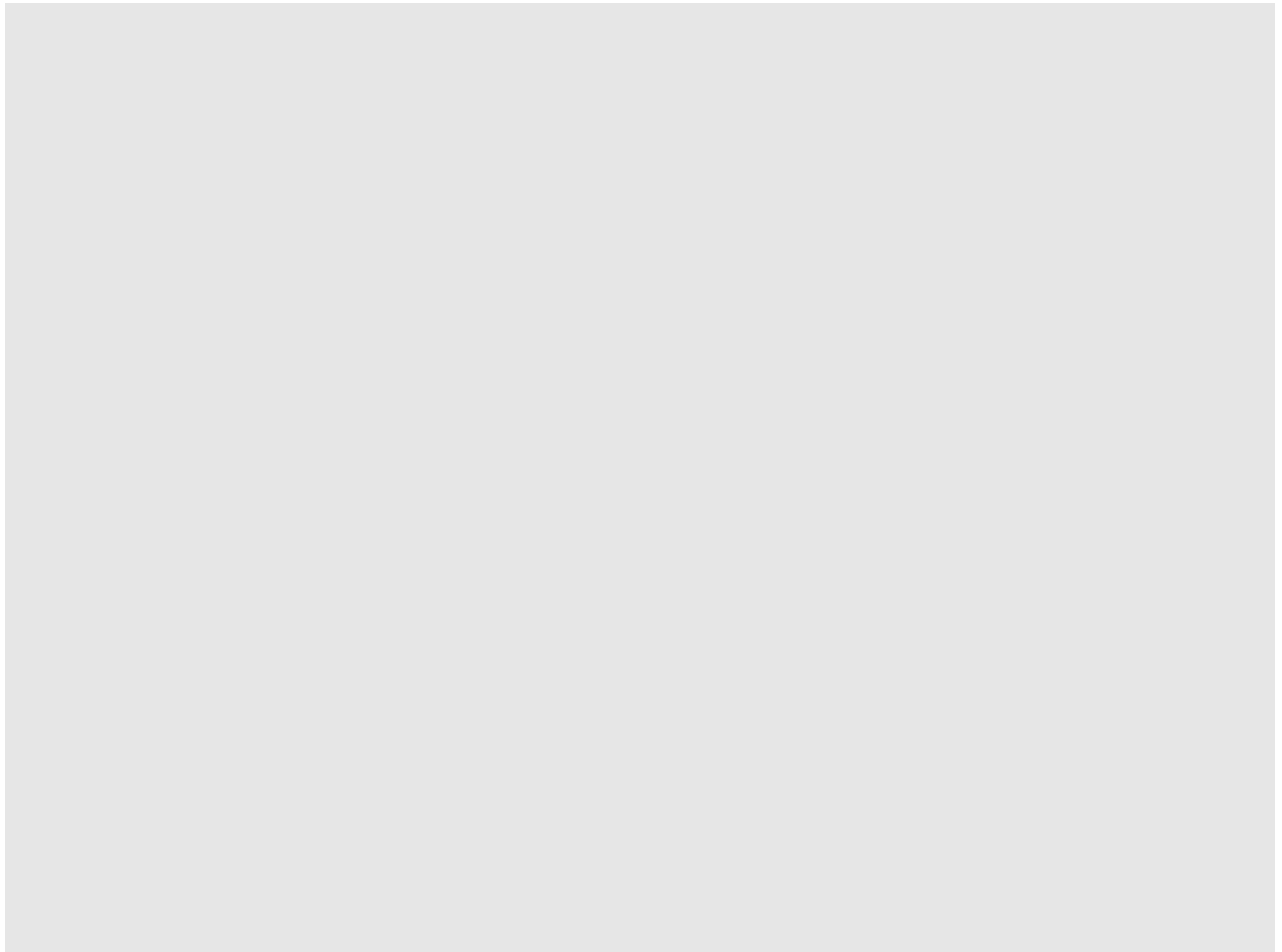
the ninth floors. It spent years renovating the former offices into modern living quarters and is looking at bringing in a coffee shop and a special events venue in the grand lobby.

The bank tower had sat vacant since First Midwest Bank, which has since been swallowed by Old National Bank, left in 2015.

"They're looking for another site in Hammond," Taylor said. "There's serious interest in more housing downtown from a few developers. It's an exciting time."

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