

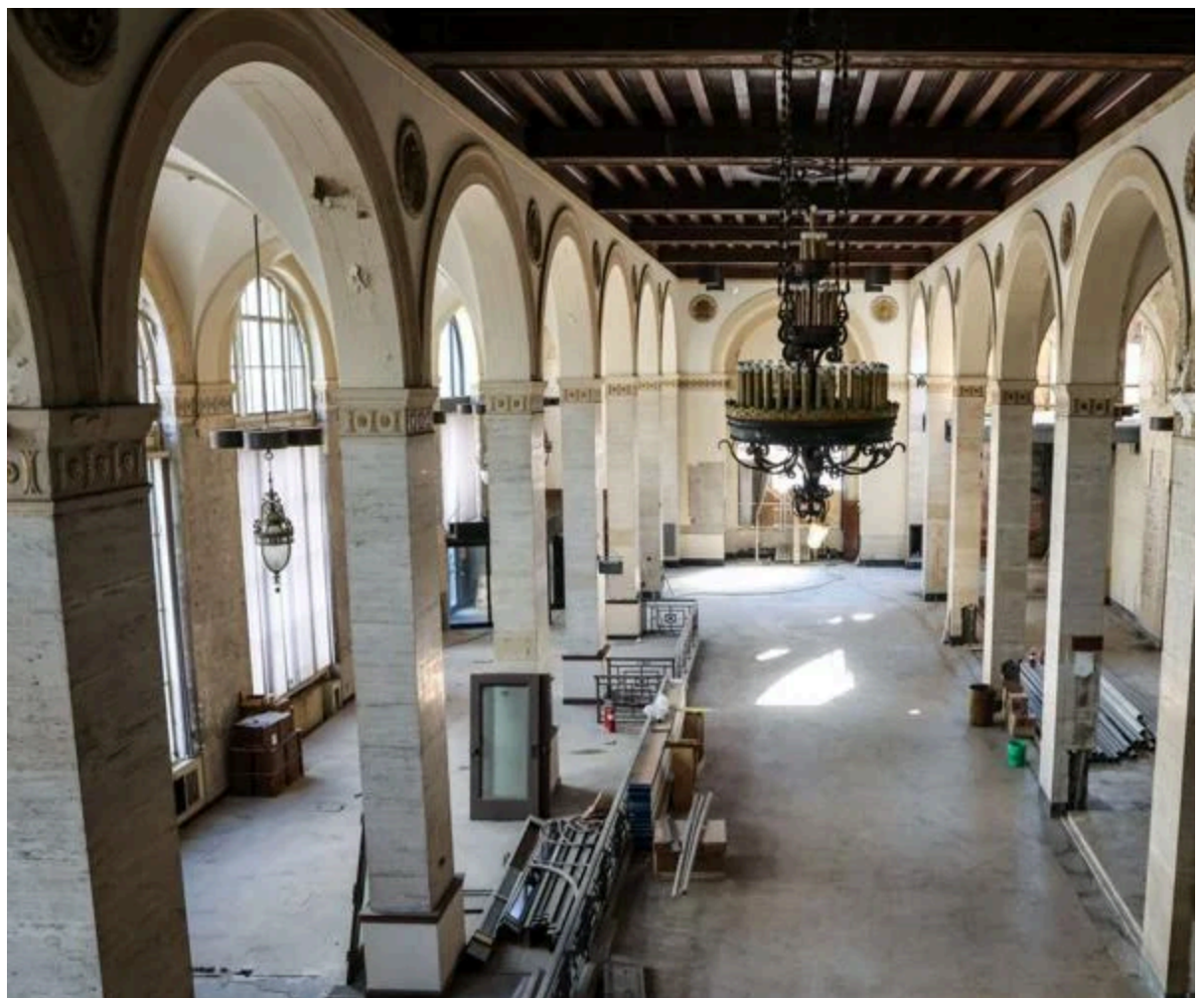
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ALERT **TOP STORY**

Historic Bank Calumet renovation reaches halfway mark, will bring apartments, wedding venue and maybe speakeasy

Joseph S. Pete

Oct 5, 2023



Renovation of the Bank Calumet tower continues in downtown Hammond. The main banking area of the former bar John J. Watkins, The Times

Joseph S. Pete

Longtime mailman Dave Woerpel vividly remembers the first time he went to pick up the outgoing mail in the nine-story Bank Calumet building with an imposing limestone facade that's towered over downtown Hammond for nearly a century.

No one told him he'd need a cart for all the mail bankers and other business people dropped down the chute to the lobby of the 112-foot-bank tower at 5231 Hohman Ave.

Woerpel popped open the brass door and watched as a high-rise's worth of letters and correspondence cascaded everywhere. It took 45 minutes to clean up.

"It was like that prank where you open the closet and all the ping pong balls come out," he said. "In 1979, when I was a mailman, this downtown was hopping and it just went away. This is why I love this project going on so much."

Now a Hammond city council member, he reminisced while touring the long-shuttered bank building that's now being transformed into contemporary loft-style apartments and a wedding venue in the high-vaulted lobby. It also will host a co-working space, likely a coffee shop and possibly a speakeasy in the basement where the vault was.

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The historic renovation of the building constructed by immigrant craftsmen in 1924 is more than halfway complete.

NWI Development Group, a strategic operating partner of the UpperCross Development Group that's done projects in Michiana over the last decade, plans to invest up to \$24 million to convert Hammond's tallest building into 100 market-rate apartments with ground-floor retail.

It will be known as The Banc and feature views of the Chicago skyline between the fifth and ninth floors.

"We are excited we are over 50% through construction and are transitioning to leasing and welcoming our new residents here soon," said Anastacia Fratto, principal of the development team.

New residents should be able to move in early next year, on the 100th anniversary of when the building was built.

"There's construction all around us. Between the South Shore West Lake extension coming through downtown and all the streetscape and roadway improvements the city of Hammond is constructing, we are in the center of some significant investment that is taking place in downtown," Fratto said. Hammond will soon be home to three new train stations within city limits, there are not many places around the country you can say that about."

The Banc will be one of the first projects finished in the new Hammond Gateway Downtown Transit Development District, which was approved last August.

"We are surrounded by a lot of great things happening in downtown already. We are walking distance to grocery, a half block from the Towle Theatre and neighbors to some really incredible businesses like 18th Street Brewery and institutions like the Hammond Academy of Science of Technology and Purdue University," Fratto said. "This iconic building will be the first mixed-use development open among many in the pipeline that will make this a thriving neighborhood district that will attract even more people that want to be part of bringing new life and energy to downtown."

The 100 apartments will come in a number of floor plans, including studio, one-bedroom, two-bedroom and convertible, a larger studio with a dedicated bedroom area set aside that's in an open-air floor plan and isn't a full bedroom.

Each unfurnished apartment will come with a washer and dryer.

Residents will be able to take advantage of a fitness center, dog washing station, storage, bike storage room, secured parking and the co-working space in the grand banking hall.

"We focused on offering apartments with all the finishes and amenities that today's renters are looking for. Most of the units at The Banc are studios and one-bedroom units, so we are able to offer a more affordable price point for the community than what is being offered for larger units and single-family rentals, which end up costing more per month for renters," she said.

NWI Development Group is working with a Chicago restaurant group that's looking to take over about 1,000 square feet of ground-floor commercial space for its flagship Northwest Indiana location. The coffee shop would offer pastries and a lunch menu.

It would occupy part of the grand banking hall, which will serve as a majestic events space for corporate events and about 40 to 50 weddings a year. It includes classic pillars, imported wood and chandeliers.

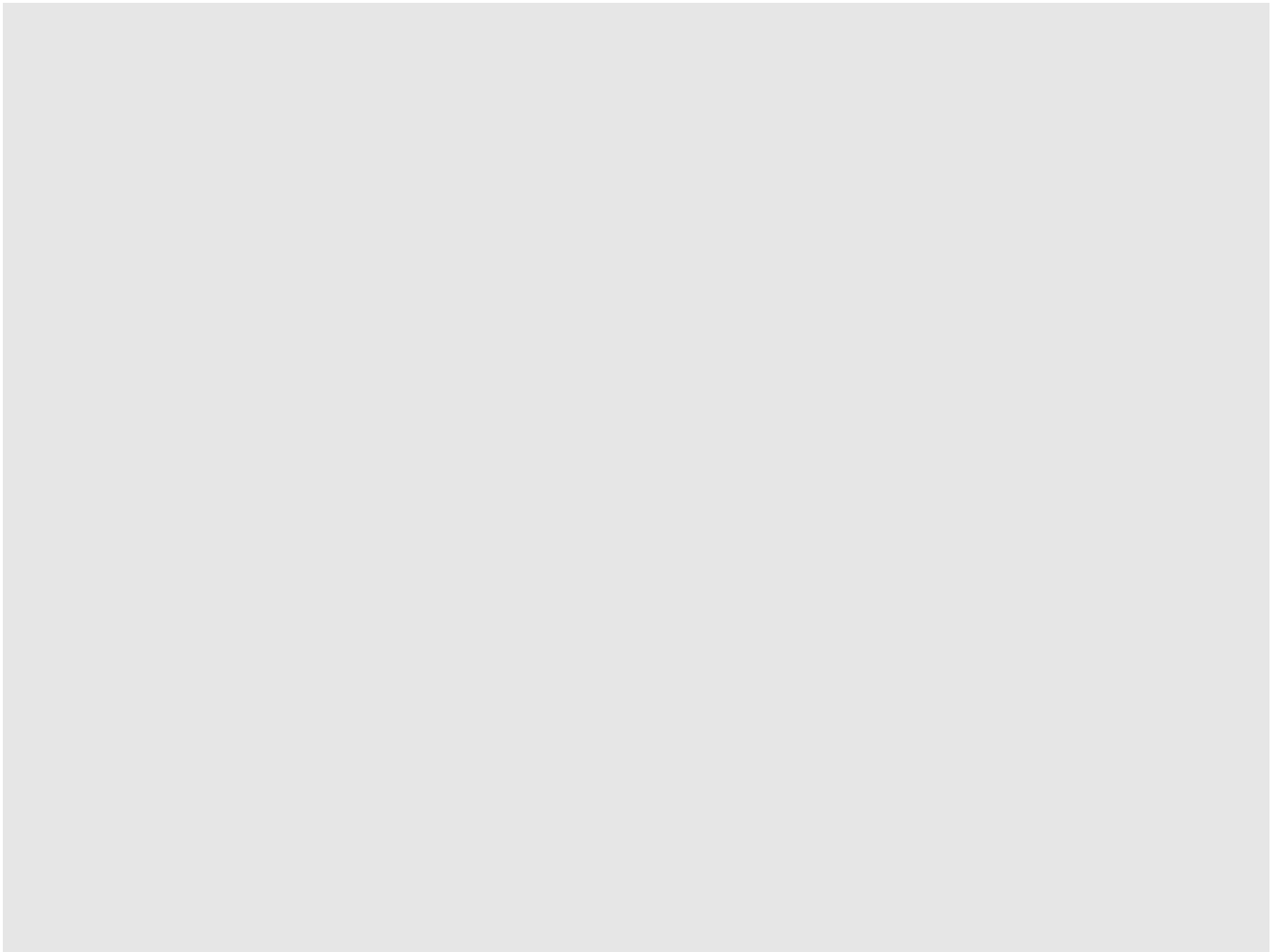
"The event center will be a destination for people that want to fully embrace the architectural beauty of this 1924 old banking hall, the space naturally wants to remain open so you can experience the full volume of these 38-foot ceilings, which we were told we brought on a boat from Germany when this was built," she said. "It is very unique and one-of-a-kind space to have your next celebration."

The project will restore the grandeur of Bank Calumet, which long was Hammond's largest homegrown financial institution before it got bought out by First Midwest Bank in 2016. First Midwest, which was recently gobbled up by Old National Bank, closed it in 2015 and it sat empty ever since.

"I've seen this work elsewhere when I went on a trip to New Jersey with One Region," Woerpel said. "We went to Newark, Jersey City and New York and saw all the development they built around the train in the Tri-State Area. We also toured Pittsburgh and Denver to see how transit-oriented development leads to stuff like this project. I hope it works. I remember how downtown used to be."

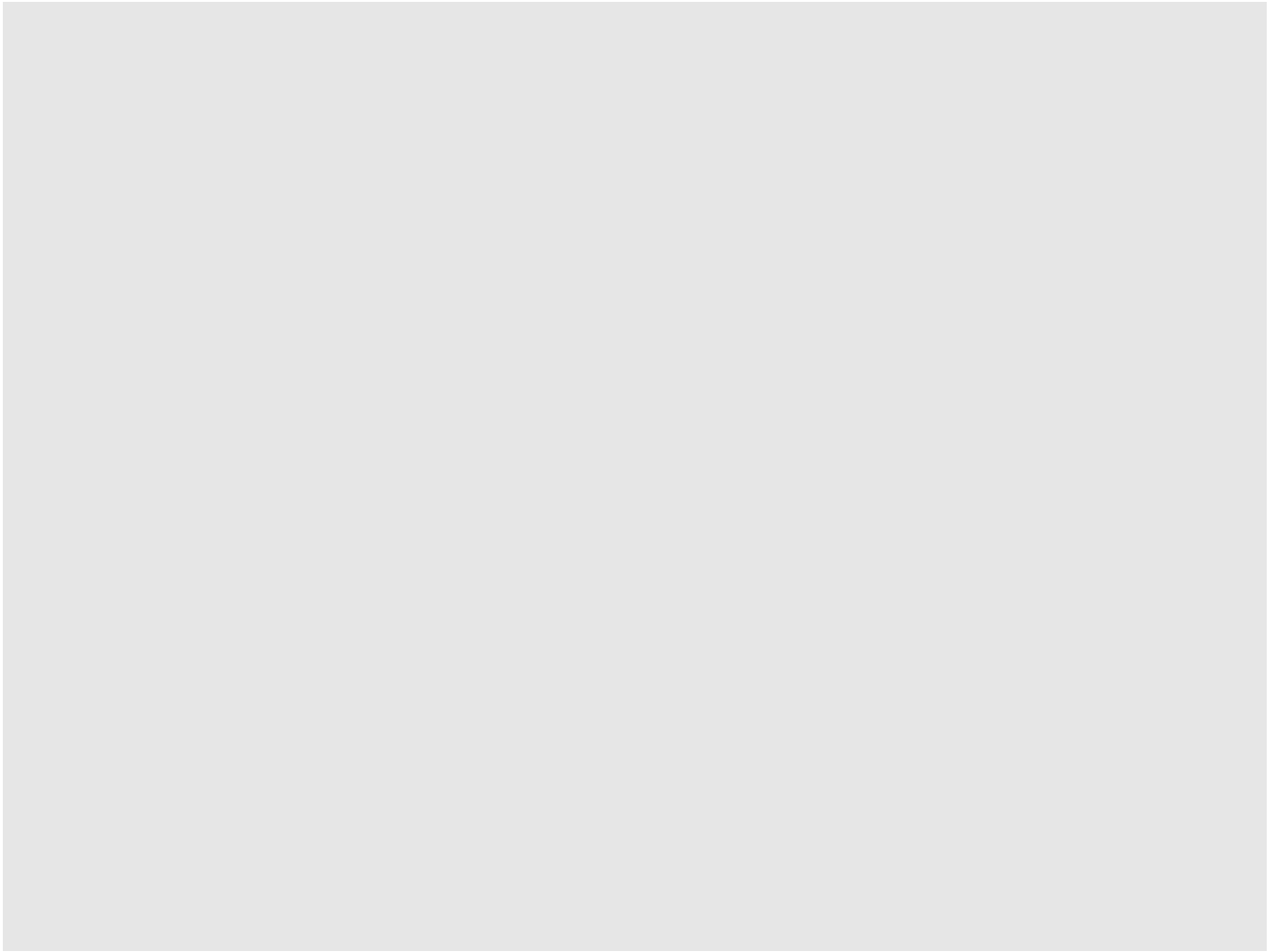
For more information, call 219-243-7184 or visit **www.thebanchammond.com**.

PHOTOS: Renovations continue on the historic Bank Calumet tower in Hammond



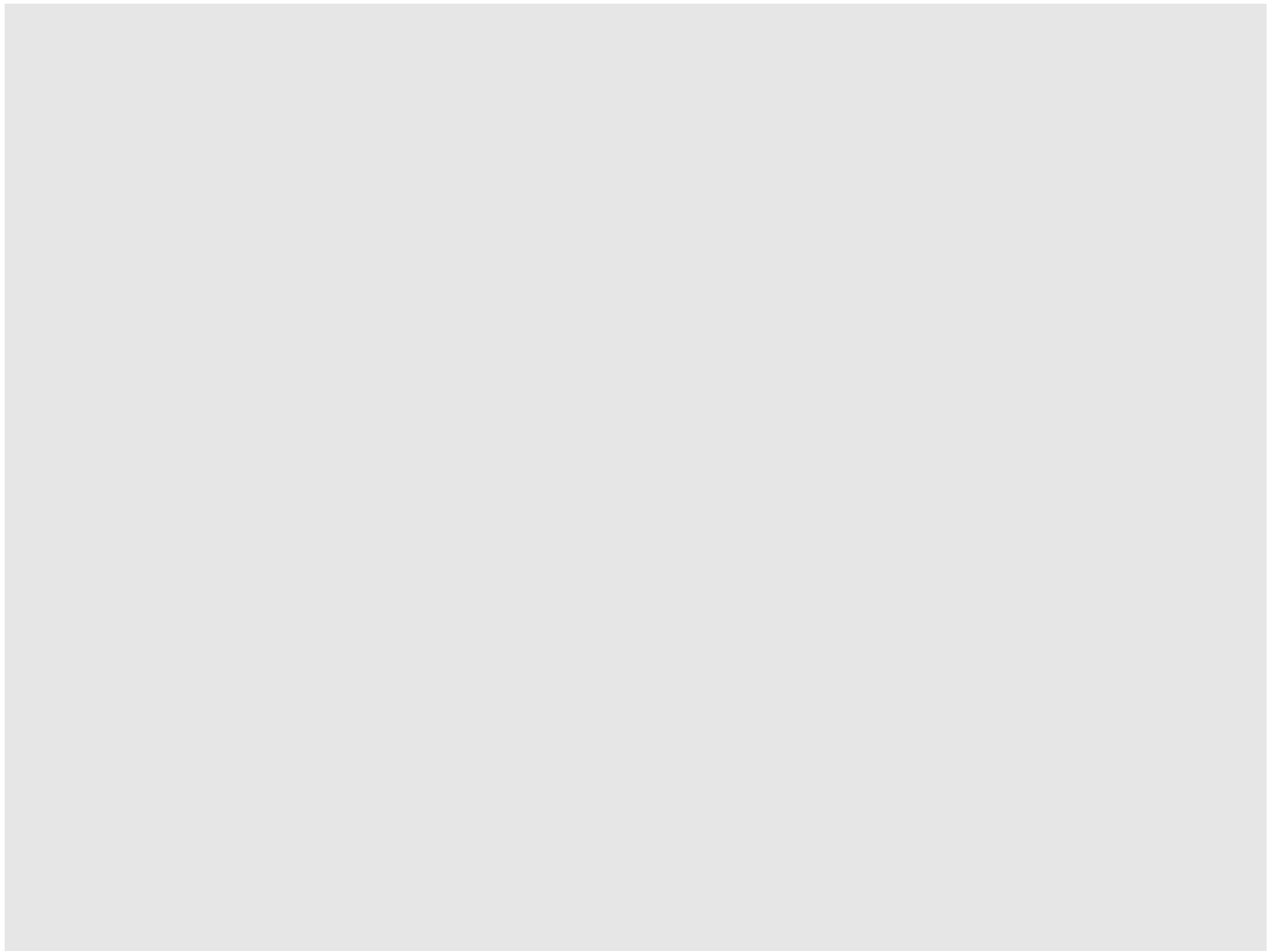
An apartment is nearing completion at the Bank Calumet tower now being renovated.

John J. Watkins, The Times



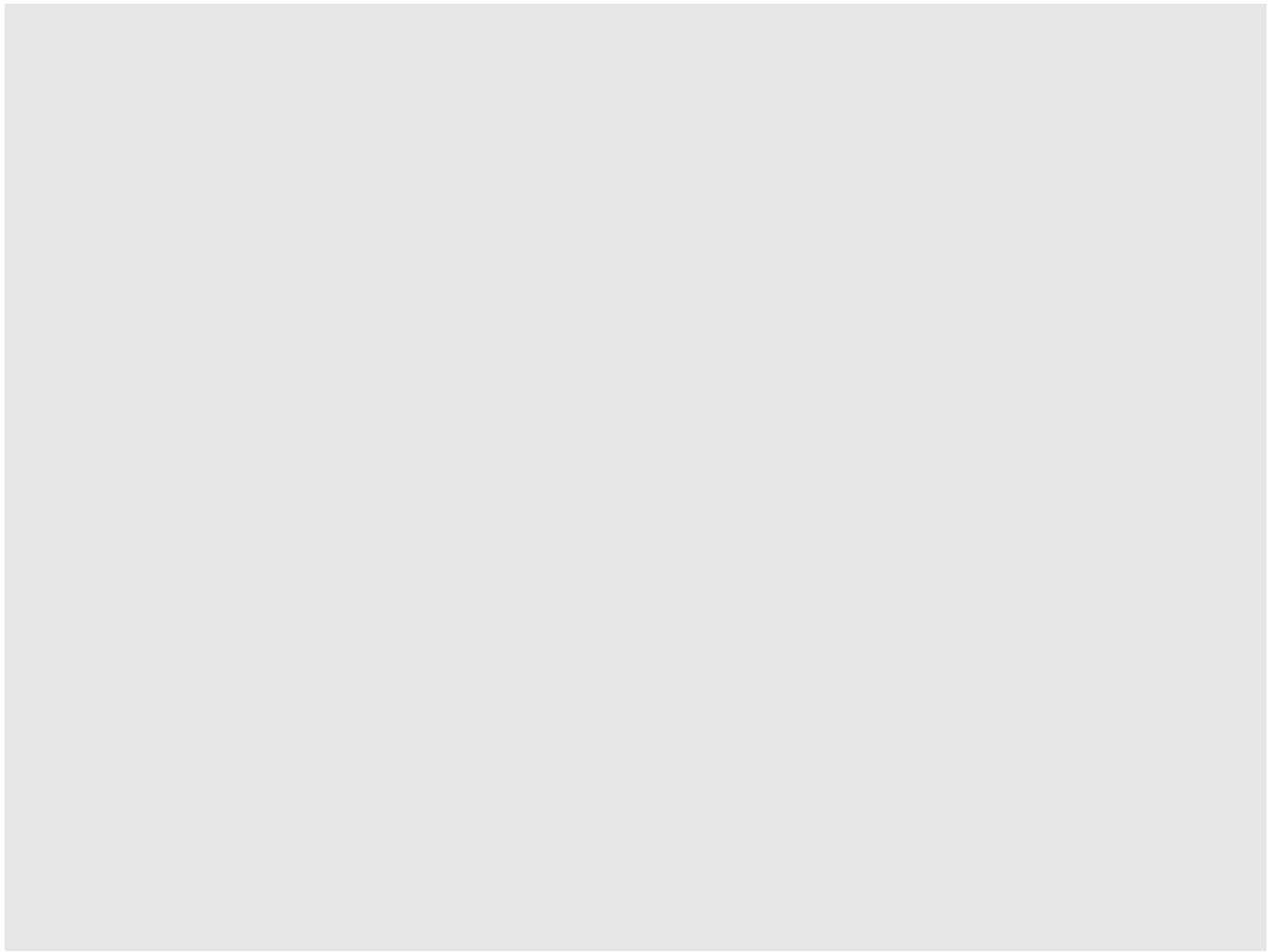
A sign advertises The Banc, a renovated Bank Calumet tower in downtown Hammond.

John J. Watkins, The Times



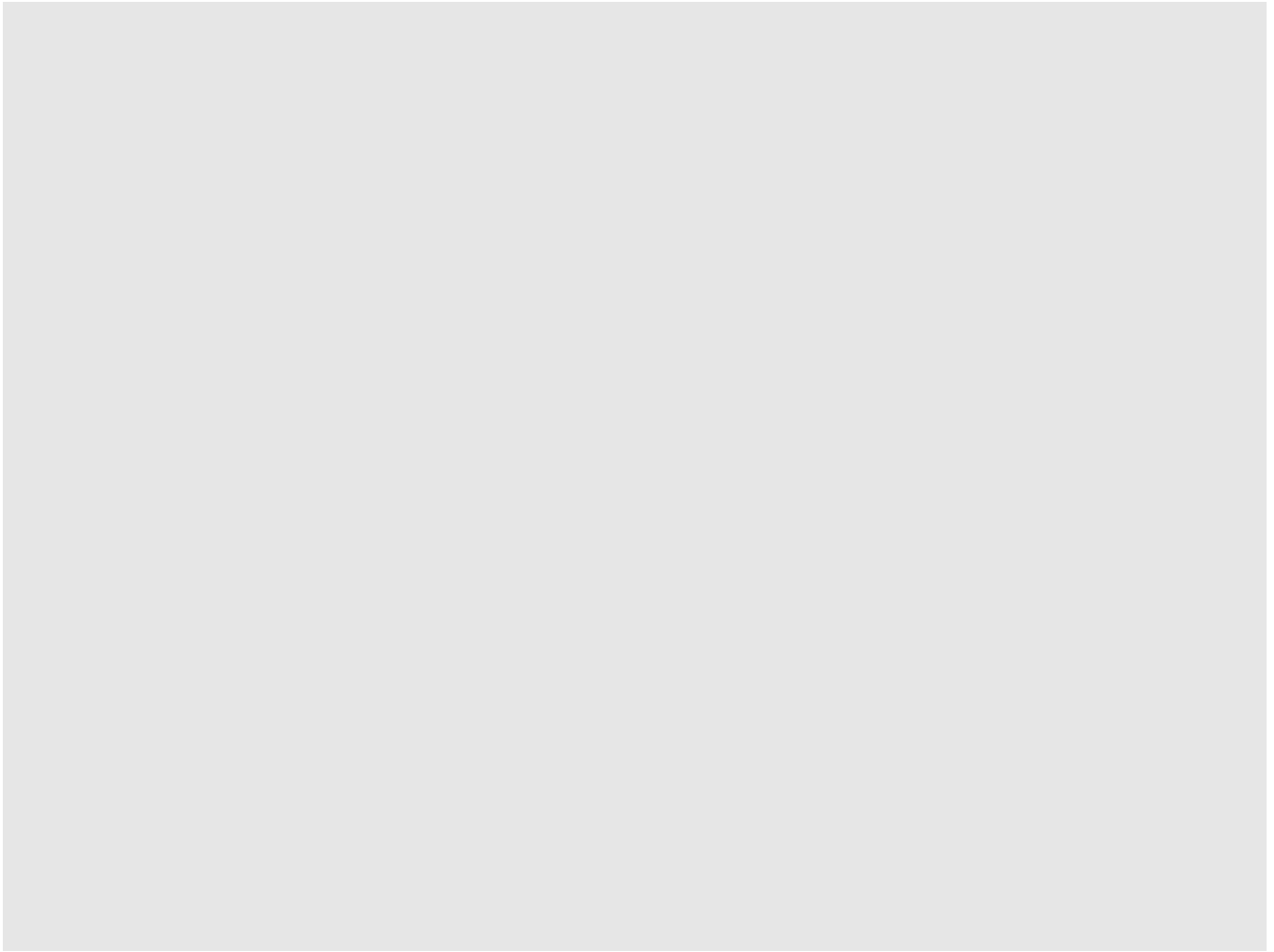
Renovated of the Bank Calumet tower continues in downtown Hammond. The main banking area of the former bank will be event space.

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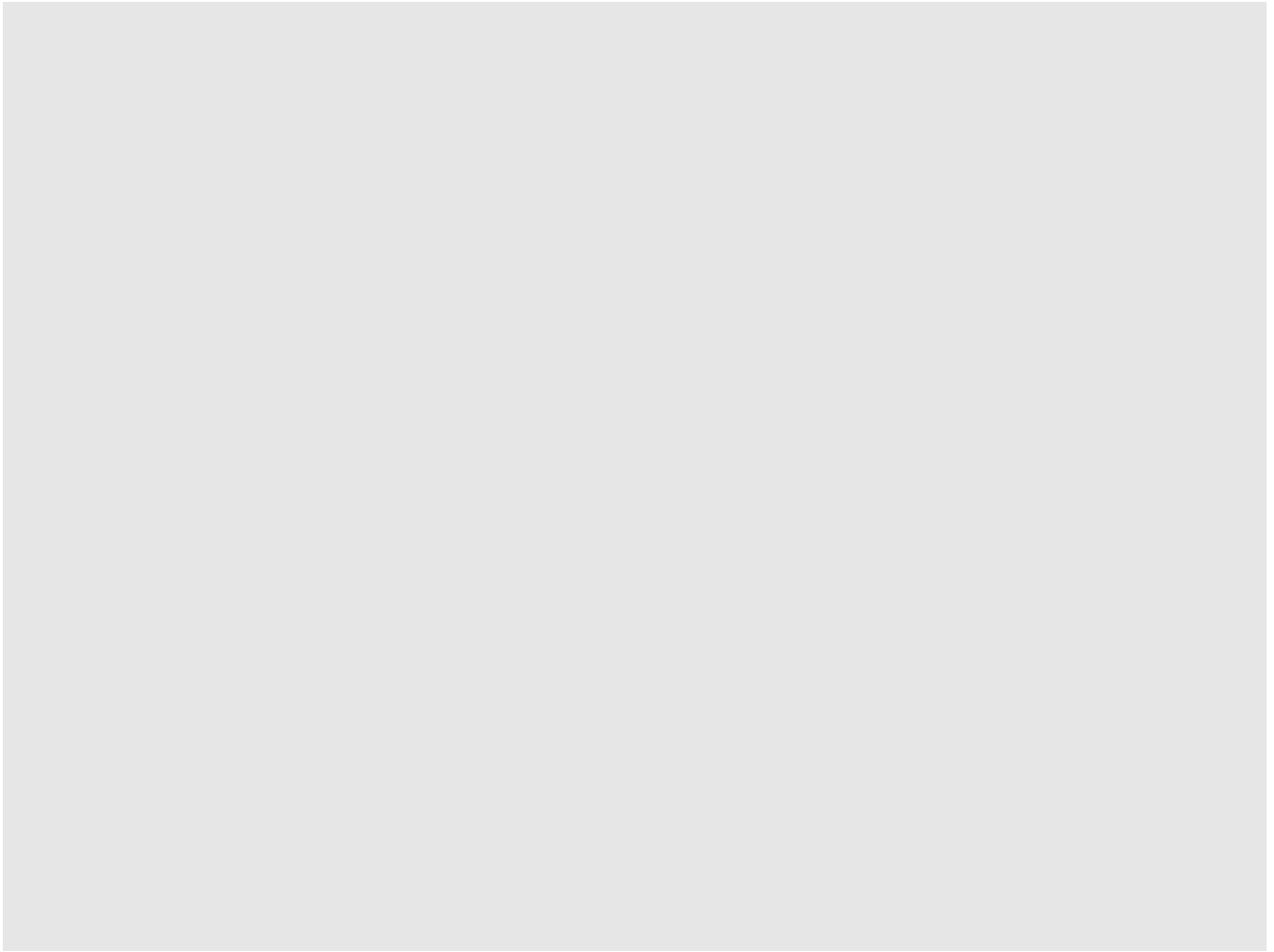
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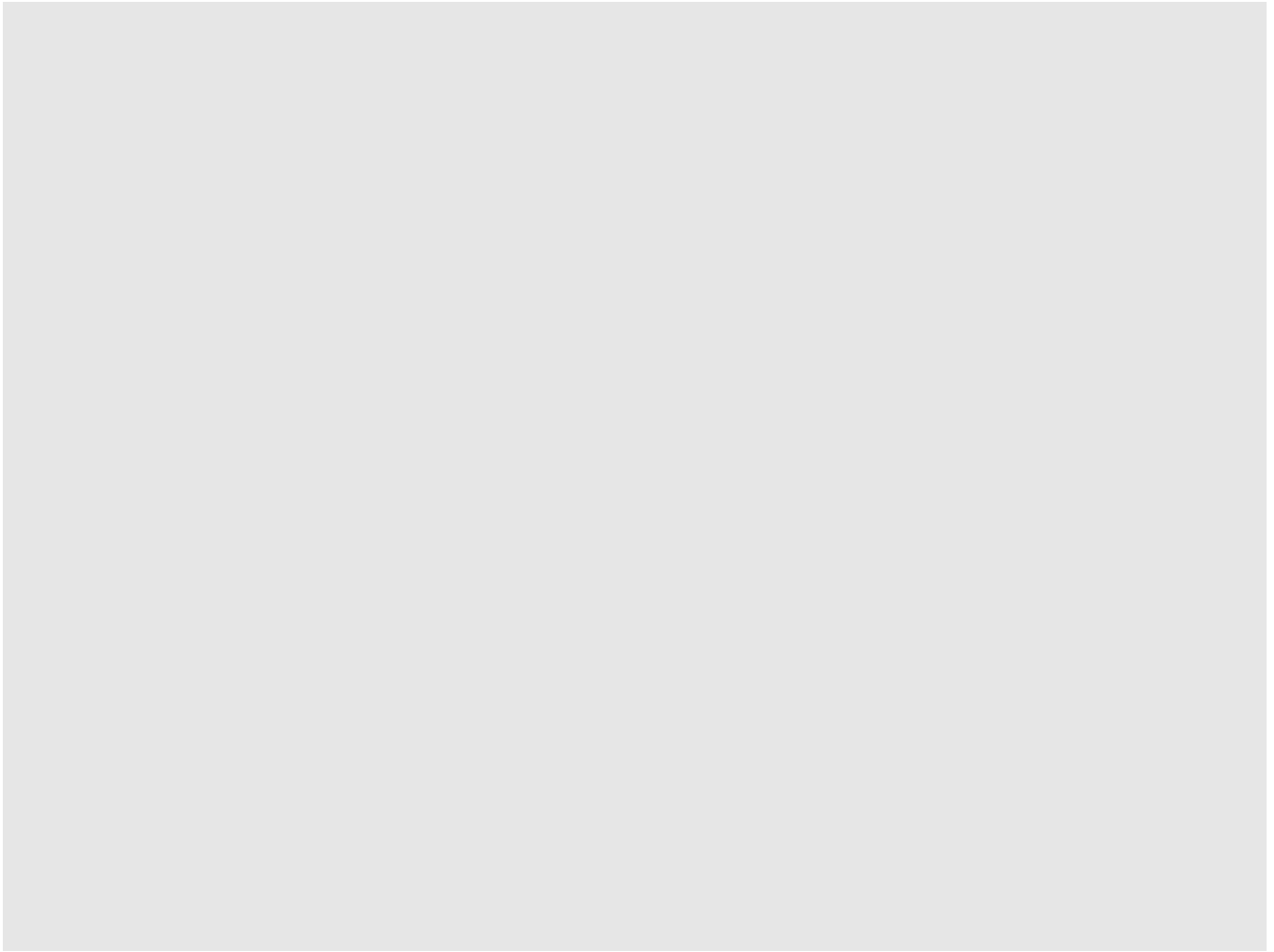
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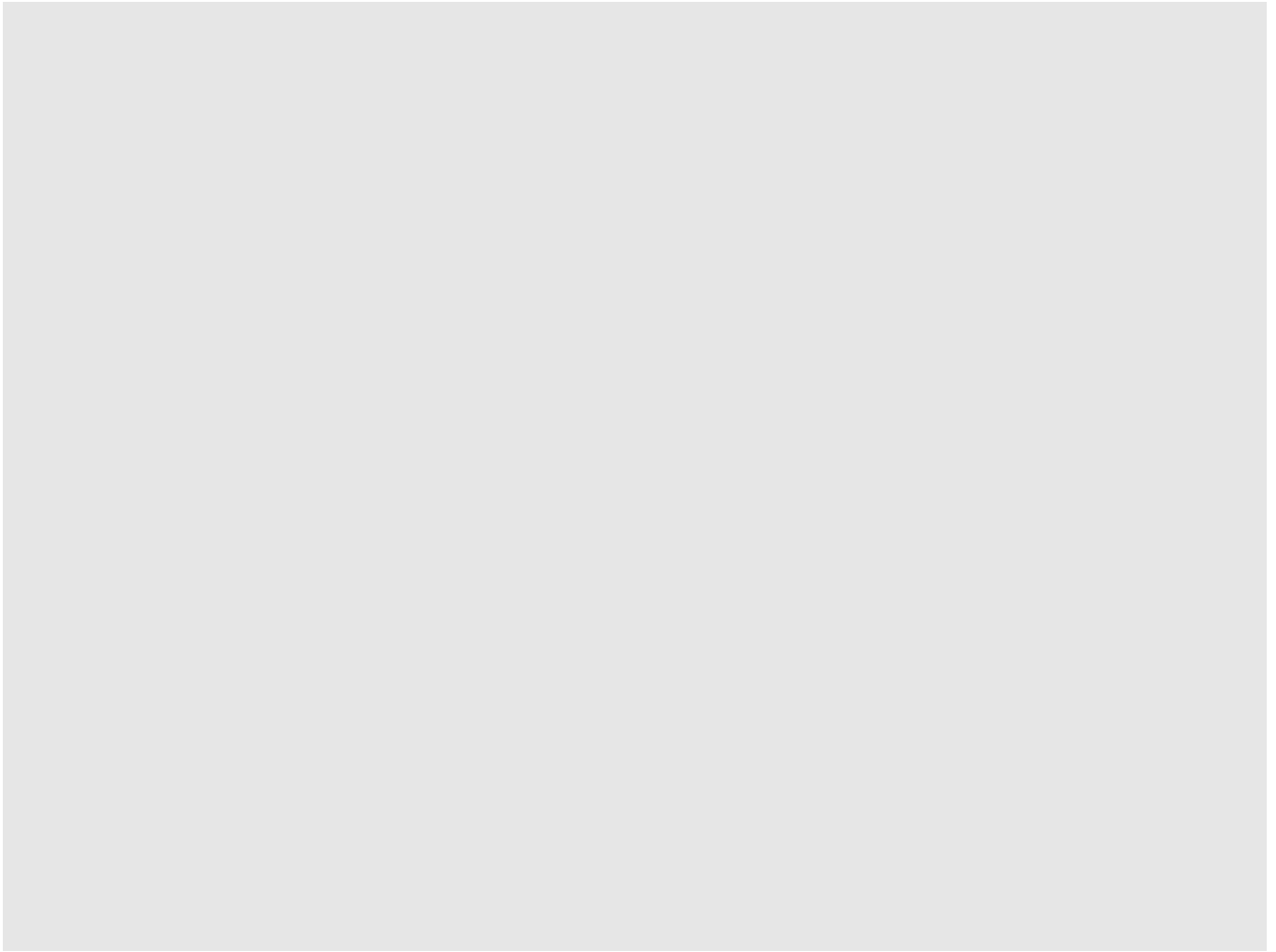
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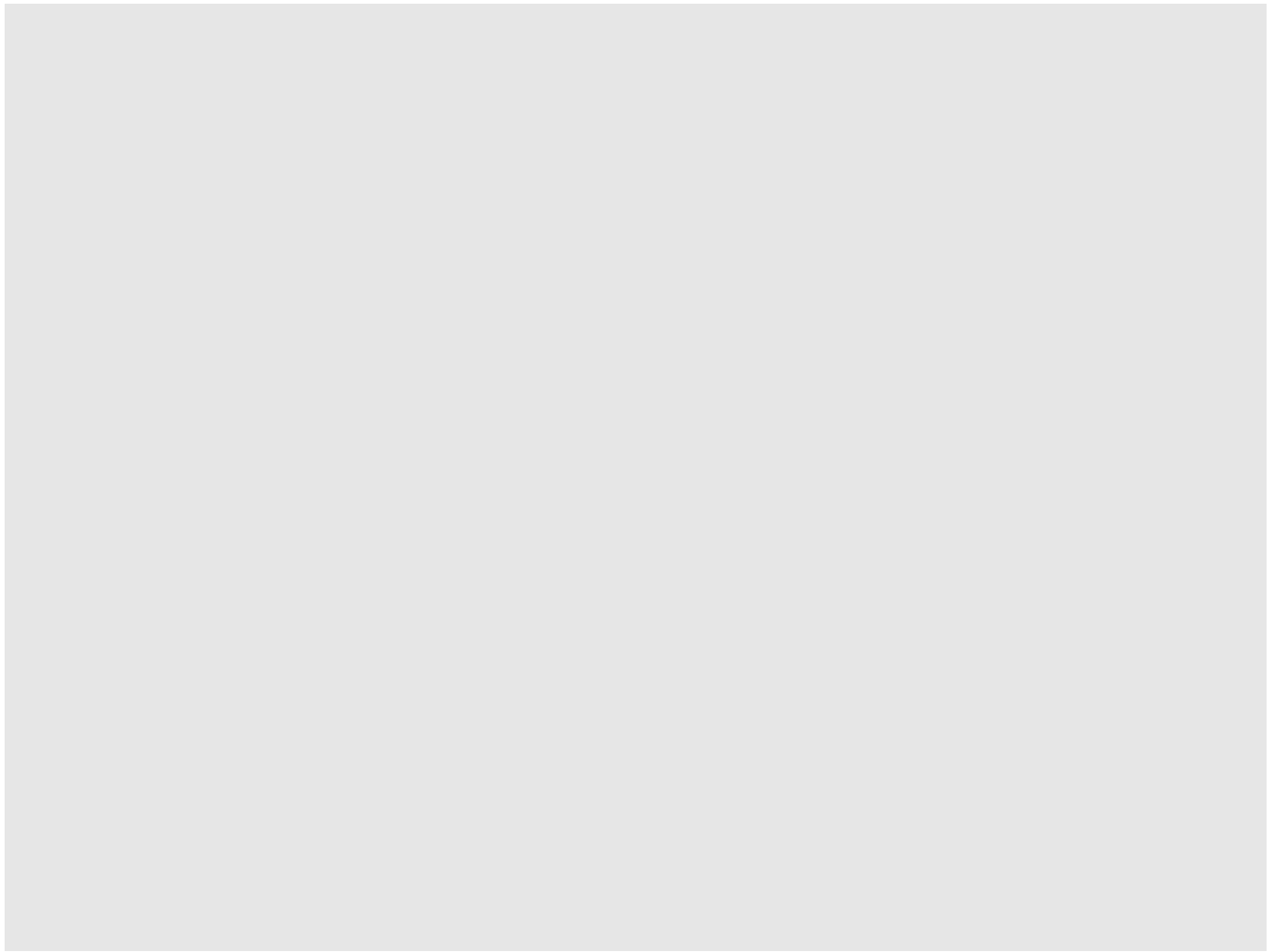
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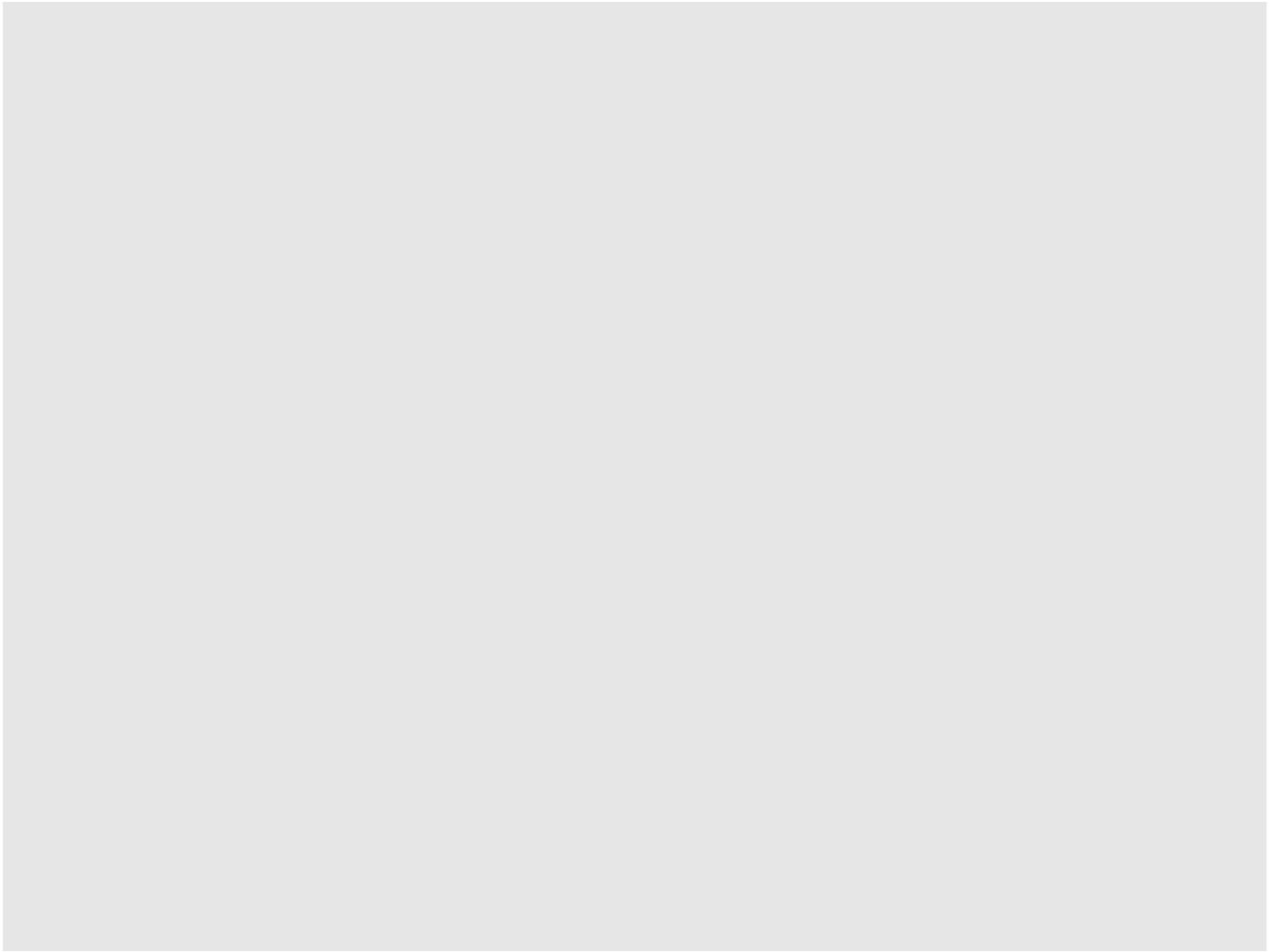
A two-bedroom apartment is framed and ready for finishing at the Bank Calumet tower.

John J. Watkins, The Times



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The clock in main banking area of the Bank Calumet tower no longer works but it still may be retained as part of the decor.

John J. Watkins, The Times

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By Joseph S. Pete
Business Reporter