

Michigan City's first Opportunity Zone project offer charm, opportunities for city

By: Beth Ireland Last Updated: May 9, 2020



For several years, Michigan City has been working hard to develop and improve the charm of its many neighborhoods. A large part of the development has been through [Opportunity Zones](#), allowing developers to invest in new areas for growth. The first [Opportunity Zone](#), the historic Zorn Complex located in the Elston Grove district, is nearing completion, and both the Economic Development Corporation of Michigan City (EDCMC) and the developer Blue Harbor are looking forward to the opportunities this addition will bring to the city.

"It's a really cool and charming building, but it needed a tremendous amount of development. It's a big investment for the area," said Anastacia Fratto, Strategic Partner at Blue Harbor, a partnership between UpperCross Development Group and Beucler Properties.

"The EDCMC is very excited to see this project come to fruition. Michigan City is still an investment paradise, and we're looking at various new projects. This is a great addition to what we have currently and what's coming in the future," said Clarence Hulse, Executive Director at EDCMC.

Barrelhouse Lofts and Barrelhouse at the Zorn event center is a unique mix of commercial and residential space. The first floor offers a 6,000 square foot event space complete with a bar area and smaller event room (perfect for a bridal suite, cocktail hour space, or dessert area). The open-concept space is unique and charming and offers a new venue for weddings, large parties, family gatherings, or any special event.

"There's definitely demand in the area for something cool and unique. We've been getting a lot of interest in bringing something different to the community, and Barrelhouse at Zorn fills that need. It's something a little more unique. That's kind of the vibe of Michigan City; it's a unique place. I think there's a lot of pride in being able to offer something that's not traditional," Hulse said.

The event space is also a boost to local businesses. Working with local caterers and restaurants, the Barrelhouse at Zorn provides an additional opportunity for expanding the local entertainment industry.

"The lofts fill an important niche downtown and offers a large event space to the downtown area. This adds to what is already happening with our downtown," Hulse said. "We see many more events happening because of this space including professional, corporate, and family events."

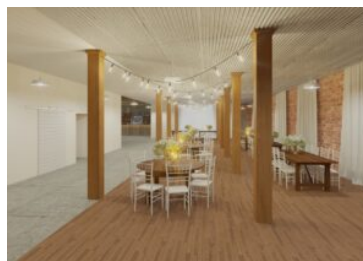
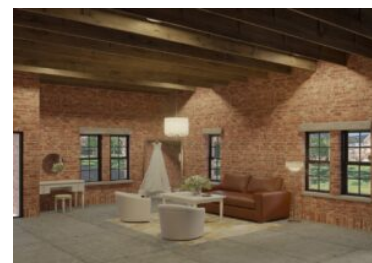
Blue Harbor is also planning to partner with Beachwalk Vacation Rentals.

"If there are folks who are wanting to have an event at the Barrelhouse at Zorn and need to accommodate people overnight or for the weekend, we're working with Beach Walk to provide housing options. There are a lot of great amenities that they can offer," Fratto said.

Upstairs are three beautiful, loft-style apartments for rent with ebony black windows, and high ceilings and Blue Harbor was even able to preserve some of the original brick. Each apartment will have two designated parking spaces and secure entry.

"We worked with the city to make sure that we met standards but still preserved that charm of the original building," Fratto said.

Blue Harbor recognized the need for the charming event space and the unique opportunity the Barrelhouse offered for redeveloping the historic neighborhood of Elston Grove.



"It's a really special building. It's a complex of three or four historic buildings, and it's right down the street from Zorn brewery. This whole complex is coming back to life," Fratto said. "There's this great energy happening right now, and there's been a lot of investment that the city has made in Elston Grove over the years in hopes that this neighborhood would come back to life. What I get excited about is the community activity, the liveliness of this district and this complex because it is special. I think that's what the city hopes for as well."

Keeping that historic charm is important for Michigan City as a whole.

"I think it's important to provide developers with the incentive to repurpose these buildings because it's the character of the community," Fratto said. "It says a lot about the community when you have these older buildings that have that history and memories for those that live in the community. These buildings are a huge part of the community landscape and history."

The Barrelhouse Lofts are projected to be completed mid-June, and Barrelhouse at Zorn will be open for events in July. Blue Harbor is taking all of the health guidelines and safety precautions into consideration regarding Covid-19.

"We want to open with confidence and safety for our guests and the people who are going to be in our space. We're going to have a social distance coordinator and a lot of thought and attention paid to making sure these events are safe and that we're properly following the guidelines," Fratto said.

For more information about the Barrelhouse at Zorn, visit <https://www.barrelhouseatzorn.com/>.

For more information on the Economic Development Corporation of Michigan City, visit their website at <https://www.edcmc.com/>.



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