

Apartments key to developer's plan to revive Strutwear Knitting building in Minneapolis

Project aims to bring more affordable rental units to Downtown East area.

By Jim Buchta (<http://www.startribune.com/jim-buchta/10644536/>) Star Tribune |

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A former hosiery factory in downtown Minneapolis that was the site of a historic labor dispute before becoming an office building could be repurposed one more time — this time as apartments.

Kharbanda Development is seeking feedback from the Minneapolis Planning Commission's committee of the whole for its plans to convert the former Strutwear Knitting Co. building into 179 rentals.

The Strutwear building, now known as the 1010 Building, is at 1010 S. Seventh St., and occupies an entire city block across the street from U.S. Bank Stadium in the Elliot Park neighborhood in Minneapolis.

Varun Kharbanda said that while plans are still evolving, the goal is to offer some units that are more compact — and affordable — than many of the luxury market-rate buildings that are being built in other parts of downtown. Many of the units will be in the 500- to 1,000-square-foot range; rents haven't been set.

There are no income-restricted units," Kharbanda said. "But we're looking to provide more affordable housing options."

The Art Deco-style building was built in phases in the 1920 and '30s and has a stone and brick exterior and poured concrete columns. A 1980s addition that covers a courtyard creates an atrium and functions as the main entrance.

Though the distinct seven-story building and its three-story tower stand out in an area that has been largely redeveloped in recent years — and in the shadow of the U.S. Bank Stadium, it is not the architecture of the building that makes it historic. According to the National Register of Historic Places (<https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/15000791.htm>), the building was the site of one of the most important labor victories in the history of the city, contributing to the "broad patterns of our history."

During the mid-1930s, Strutwear employees, management and an anti-labor business association were involved in an eight-month-long standoff that mobilized thousands of industrial workers. The effort marked a turning point in Minneapolis's labor movement, according to the National Register.

"It was particularly a triumph for Strutwear's nearly 900 female workers, who were initially excluded from the union's member drive," according to the Register. "Before the Strutwear strike, the American Federation of Hosiery Workers had not included women among its ranks, but their participation was crucial to the strike's success."

"The building is very uniquely rooted in the women's movement," Kharbanda said. "We're going to try to bring some of that history forward."

Although the building has been mostly vacant for several years, it has been used in a variety of ways, including as field offices for contractors working on the U.S. Bank Stadium, and for operations and security during the Super Bowl.



BRIAN PETERSON — STAR TRIBUNE

The Minneapolis Planning Commission Committee of the Whole will take up a proposal Thursday to convert a former factory at 1010 S.

A 16-page report submitted by BKV Group architects on behalf of Kharbanda, which is pursuing state and federal historic tax credits, proposes minimal exterior changes.

Inside, plans call for apartments that would line the perimeter of each floor of the former factory. Kharbanda said that windows on the lower level could be opened up to accommodate a restaurant or brewery in the lower level in addition to storage and resident amenity space.

A rooftop would be converted into a resident gathering space with grilling areas and other amenities. An adjacent parking garage built after the original building would provide resident parking. A south-facing plaza would be replaced by a drive-through drop-off that would include a row of 14 parking spaces.

Kharbanda said the conversion is expected to take 14 months and he is hoping for a late spring 2021 opening.

The building is one of the few — and largest — full-block redevelopment parcels still available in downtown. It is situated in an area that is known as Downtown East where there has been significant commercial and residential redevelopment over the past decade.

JoAnna Hicks, principal at Element Commercial Real Estate in Minneapolis, said residential development makes sense for the building.

"Rental conversion of that building is a good strategy," she said. "It has struggled to attract significant office interest and the location has improved for a residential location with Downtown East's development."

Vanessa Haight, executive director of Elliot Park Neighborhood Inc., said although the developer has yet to make a presentation to the group, she supports this kind of adaptive reuse of historic buildings.

The group is a nonprofit that focuses on housing and development issues in the neighborhood.

"Investing in a historic property is great for the neighborhood," she said. "In general, we are supportive of additional housing."

Haight said that the neighborhood is expected to gain hundreds of units over the next few years. While she supports more housing, the neighborhood is now focused on making sure current low-income residents can afford to stay in the area.

"The neighborhood is wary of potential rising housing costs and displacement," she said. "Rapid growth in a predominantly low-income neighborhood is a complicated and dynamic conversation."

Jim Buchta has covered real estate for the Star Tribune for several years. He also has covered energy, small business, consumer affairs and travel.

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