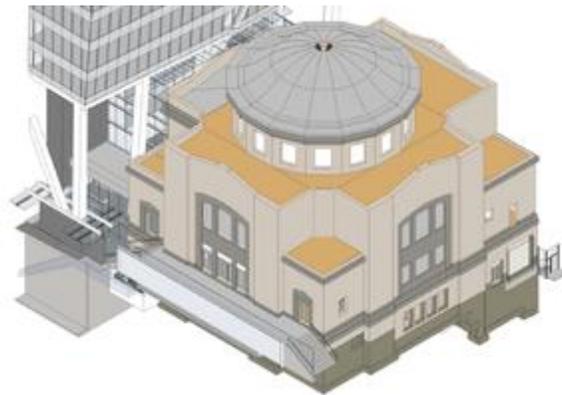


This 107-year-old downtown church is about to become a restaurant and ballroom

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A city of Seattle board on Wednesday is scheduled to look at how a high-rise, now under construction downtown at Fifth Avenue and Columbia Street will tie into the historic church next door.

The question over what would happen to a magnificent downtown Seattle building that used to house a church sanctuary has long hung over a Seattle developer's plans to build a high-rise right next door.

The answer is now coming to light.

Daniels Real Estate, the developer of the 43-story Fifth + Columbia project now under construction and owner of the 107-year-old sanctuary building that sits next to the project, plans to convert the former church into a restaurant and ballrooms.

That is according to a packet of information that Daniels submitted to the City Landmarks Preservation Board, which is scheduled to receive a briefing Wednesday afternoon on the proposed interior and exterior alterations to the former church building.

Drawings in the packet show that the restaurant will fill the existing main sanctuary level and the balcony level, and that there will be ballrooms in the basement. People will be able to enter the restaurant from the tower.

The lower floors of the high-rise will become SLS Seattle, a luxury hotel, and the upper floors will be office space. The total project cost is more than \$400 million, and it's scheduled for completion in 2017.

ZGF Architects' Seattle office designed the tower and noted French designer Philippe Starck is designing the hotel interiors and working on the plan for the former sanctuary. Ron Wright is the historic architect for the project, and JTM is the general contractor on the refurbishment of the hall as well as the Fifth + Columbia tower.

Kevin Daniels, head of the development company, said Monday that the sanctuary building is "a component of the SLS experience." He added the team is "just in the preliminary concept design phase." There's a year's worth of work to do, he said, adding, "We are at the big idea stage now."

Daniels and its financial partner, Stockbridge Capital of San Francisco, bought the sanctuary and adjacent parcel where the high-rise is going up, in 2008. They paid Seattle First United Methodist Church \$32 million, agreeing to preserve the sanctuary and move the congregation to a new church near Seattle Center.

Daniels started construction on the tower but halted work when government regulators seized Washington Mutual Bank and placed it into receivership with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. in 2008, as WaMu's closure opened up a significant amount of office space in downtown Seattle. Daniels Real Estate turned the sanctuary into a recital hall, and leased the building out to a branch of the Mars Hill Church, which disbanded Jan. 1.