

Rocky Mountain News

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Two hotels could open by Aug. 2008

By John Rebchook, Rocky Mountain News
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An Indiana company is expected to start demolishing the Motor Hotel parking garage at 14th and Stout streets next week to pave the way for two new hotels on a parking lot across from the Colorado Convention Center.

While officials from the developer, Merrillville, Ind.-based Whiteco Industries, didn't return phone calls, there's an outside chance that the 27-story Embassy Suites and 20-story Homewood Suites hotels could open in time for the Democratic Convention in August 2008.

"The two hotels combined, if they haven't changed their plans, would bring something like 400 to 500 new rooms right across from the convention center," said Charlie Woolley, principal of the St. Charles Town Co., which sold the land to Whiteco.

But Woolley said getting the hotel open by the convention is far from a sure thing.

"If they start right away, that is 20 months to build it, which is an aggressive schedule on a tough site."

While a number of hotels are on the drawing board, it's unlikely any developer will give a project the green light just because of the Democratic Convention, said hotel consultant Bob Benton.

"You can't really build a hotel for one event," said Benton, principal of Robert S. Benton & Associates.

It takes at least a year to build a hotel, so the drawings, permits, and funding would need to be quickly in place, he said.

Benton said of the hotels planned, the two on 14th Street probably have the best shot of opening in time for the convention, though he agreed with Woolley that is a tight schedule.

The new 202-room Ritz Carlton in the former Embassy Suites hotel at 1881 Curtis St. and the 221-room Hilton Gardens Inn at 14th and Welton streets are under construction and will open this year.

Benton noted that accelerating hotel development plans for a single event sometimes backfires.

"In Salt Lake City, Utah, some developers did move faster to get their hotels opened by the Winter Olympics," in 2002. "They got their weeks at the Olympics, but then the market softened and they had an oversupply of hotel rooms. In hindsight, building the hotels probably wasn't the right thing to do."

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