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'W' stamps brand downtown

Luxury hotel brings high-end hipness to mall

By John Rebchook, Rocky Mountain News
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The long-awaited W Hotel finally will make its debut in Denver.

The hip hotel will be on the site of the current Office Depot at Market Street and the 16th Street Mall.

It will be developed by Denver-based Sage Hospitality Resources, headed by Walter Isenberg.

Initial plans call for a 12-story building with 180 rooms and 56 condominiums, called W Residences.

The condos, which will average 2,000 square feet each, mark the first residential properties developed by Sage, which focuses on hotels, Isenberg said.

Construction could begin as early as the third quarter of 2008, with the opening in late 2010.

Office Depot has four years left on its lease, but Isenberg said he hopes to help find a new downtown location for the office supply store long before its lease is up.

The Office Depot site has long been talked about as a redevelopment opportunity. The building previously housed a Dave Cook Sporting Goods store before the Denver chain was bought in 1988 by rival Gart Brothers (now The Sports Authority).

"We love the location, Isenberg said. "We think it is just a great corner. And it is also a site today that is very underutilized."

Sage also bought the 15,000- square-foot parking lot directly across the mall from the building. Isenberg said there are no immediate plans for the parking lot.

Isenberg noted that the W, owned by Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, has wanted to come to Denver for several years.

He said the chain had been in discussions with East West Partners for a site in its Riverfront Park neighborhood in the Central Platte Valley.

Officials at Starwood did not return a phone call seeking comment.

Isenberg said the Office Depot property, "is clearly a better site for a hotel. Clearly the Platte Valley is great for residential. This is very good for residential, too. We think it is the best of both worlds."

Isenberg said the W "fills a niche in downtown not being served."

He said there is room for the W and two other luxury hotels coming downtown - the Ritz-Carlton and Four Seasons.

"The W customer skews the demographics a little younger than at the Four Seasons and other alternatives for high-end hotels," he said.

Tami Door, president and CEO of the Downtown Denver Partnership, said the W will help Denver compete with other big cities as far as amenities and lifestyles.

"The W begins to really put us on par with other signature cities like Chicago," Door said. "The W, and a couple of other high-end hotels on the horizon, gives us the density in higher-level hotels that bodes well for downtown."

Ken Schroepel, an urban planner with the Matrix Design Group and author of the denverinfill.com blog, said the W "bridges the central business district - what we think of as downtown - and LoDo. It really brings those two district together."

The W, as well as the Four Seasons and the Ritz, have the ability to generate increased demand, although the hotel industry is "notorious" for overbuilding during good times, said Richard Scharf, president of the Denver Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau.



Mark Lennihan © AP

The W Hotel in New York City's Times Square has 507 guest rooms and 43 suites. The hotel chain likes to play around with its "W" theme. Its slogan is "Whatever/Whenever."

John Montgomery, president of Horwath Horizon Hospitality Consulting/Montgomery & Associates, called the W "a very hip, happening, cutting-edge hotel, which a lot of other chains are trying to match."

Status of hotels on the horizon

- **W Hotel:** If all goes well, ground will be broken in the third quarter of 2008, and it will open at 16th and Market streets in late 2010.
- **Ritz-Carlton:** Under construction at the former Embassy Suites site at 1881 Curtis St.
- **Four Seasons:** Partnership that plans the hotel has bought the land, but construction along 14th Street has not begun.

More about the W

- W Hotels is owned by **Starwood Hotels and Resorts**. It is one of the world's largest hotel companies, owning and operating hotels, resorts, spas, residences and vacation- ownership properties under its nine owned brands.
- The W Hotels brand features contemporary properties, with modern facilities. W Hotels' slogan is "**Whatever/ Whenever.**"
- It has 21 properties around the world.
- From the company: "Inspiring. Iconic. Innovative. Influential. From our inception, W Hotels has approached its spaces with both design and comfort in mind. Every W Hotel is a new chapter in a storybook encounter of style and soul, and as our story has taken us around the world, we have created our hotels to be unique and individual expressions of modern travel and modern living."

Prices

Survey of nightly room rates at W Hotels, one king bed, including taxes and rates:

- **W Dallas:** \$320.85
- **W Los Angeles:** \$359.29
- **W New York:** \$297.15
- **W Seattle:** \$285.53

- Photos: Hotel Photos Provided By Starwood Hotels.

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