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New club is seeking Hammerjacks site

By Lorraine Mirabella

Sun reporter

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A concert venue and club could open this summer at the former Hammerjacks nightclub, a Baltimore icon of heavy metal and rock that closed nearly two years ago to make way for a development now stalled in the housing slump.

The new club, Bourbon Street Live, would occupy both floors of the Hammerjacks building at 316 Guilford Ave. and feature live music, said James J. Temple Jr., an attorney who served for many years as legal counsel to the old nightclub and who is planning to operate the new club.

"The building was built specifically for that, so it's perfect for this kind of venue," Temple said yesterday. "We're not reinventing the wheel."

Temple and Rex Snider of Baltimore, a former Anne Arundel County police officer who has worked in nightclubs as a disc jockey, have applied to the city's Board of Liquor License Commissioners for an "arena" license, which allows for a capacity of more than 1,000 persons. The board expects to hear the petition as early as April 3 but has yet to schedule a date.

Hammerjacks closed in May 2006 after developers bought the two-story brick building and two other properties in the 300 block of Guilford with plans to build a condominium tower of at least 40 stories and ground-level shops.

RWN Development Group of Washington did not return phone calls seeking comment on the project's status. Last spring it said it would hold off on the tower until the condo market picked up but would proceed with a first phase, a garage with ground-floor retail.

Year's delay

In January, an RWN executive vice president said demolition of the buildings, including the former Hammerjacks, and construction of the garage - which was to start this year - would be delayed at least a year.

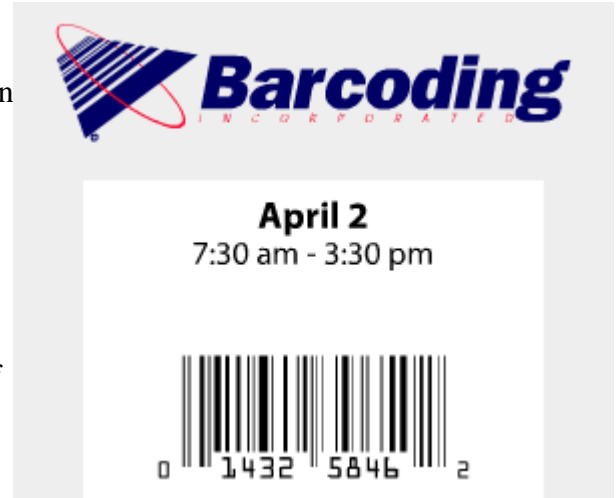
Temple said he has signed a lease with the developer for the 25,000-square-foot club and plans to invest possibly as much as \$1 million in renovations and new equipment for a concert venue and nightclub modeled after buildings in the French Quarter of New Orleans.

He said he has been talking with concert promoters and expects to showcase popular mainstream music rather than any one specific theme.

He said he could not comment on the length of the lease or the developer's ultimate plans for the site.

"We've entered into a lease we're comfortable with," he said. "What their ultimate plans are, I honestly don't know."

Kirby Fowler, president of the Downtown Partnership, said the proposed redevelopment appears to be on hold but could



still happen.

"My understanding is at some point the developer intends to go forward with an apartment or condo tower," he said. "I would imagine they are seeking some way to generate revenue on the property until the market turns around."

Despite the slowdown in the residential market, housing demand, especially for apartments, remains strong in downtown Baltimore, he said. Yet projects have stalled because financing has dried up, he said.

"We believe there is demand for the housing product ... but investors are very reluctant to invest in the housing market generally," Fowler said.

Dwindling supply

"Without financing we're going to be at the point where demand will outstrip the supply of residential product."

RWN Development had paid about \$21 million for the former Hammerjacks, the Saratoga Court Apartments at Saratoga Street and Guilford Avenue, which it plans to keep and where new shops are opening, and the Guilford Avenue parking garage next door.

Hammerjacks had moved to Guilford Avenue in 2000. The club never regained its legendary status after moving from its original spot in a cavernous club under an Interstate 395 overpass.

That location, where bands such as Guns 'N' Roses and the Ramones played, was demolished and paved over for Ravens stadium parking.

lorraine.mirabella@baltsun.com

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