

Developers are working on plans for two more Providence hotels

■ At least six other hotels are in various stages of planning or completion in Providence and other R.I. communities.

By **GREGORY SMITH**
Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE — A co-owner of the Providence Marriott and a widely known developer are working to build a hotel across the street from the Westin Hotel downtown. And another developer is inquiring about building a hotel on city property at the east

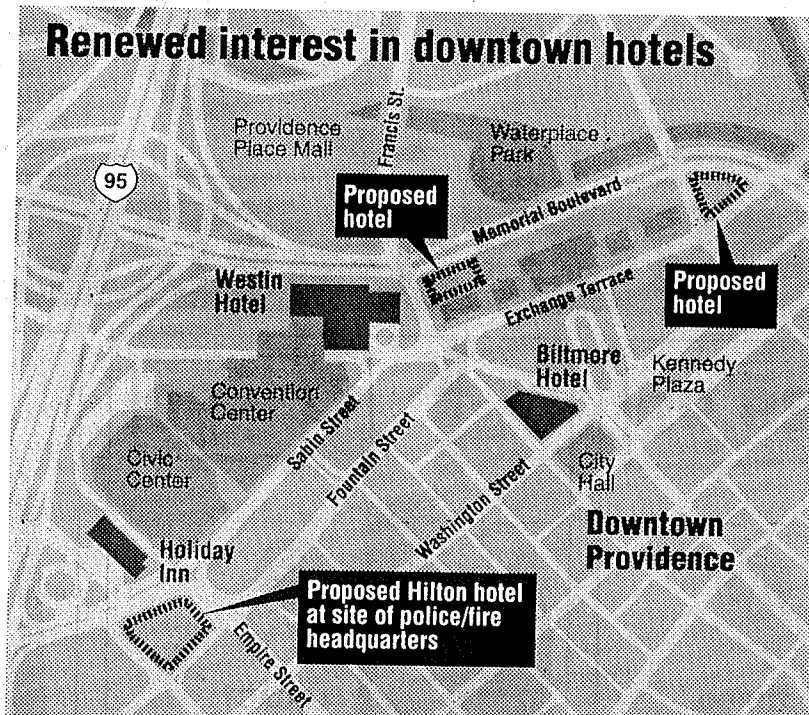
end of the former Union Station.

Arthur M. Robbins, a co-owner of the Marriott, and developer Ron Marsella are involved in the first project, which would be built at the west end of the parking lot behind the former Union Station.

Mayor Vincent A. Cianci Jr. said the partners are "far along in

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Renewed interest in downtown hotels



Journal-Bulletin/GEORGE SYLVIA

their plans" and that he has met with them at least twice. "Any announcement would have to come from them," the mayor said.

Robbins and Marsella confirmed their plans Friday but said they were not ready to disclose details.

"We've been working on this very aggressively for the past year and a half," said Marsella. A hotel and a residential building behind the former train station were part of the original plan for the redevelopment of the property in the 1980s, he recalled.

Separately, Cianci said that a developer, whom he would not identify, wants to discuss with him the construction of a hotel on a city-owned lot that sits as a triangular island between Memorial Boulevard, Exchange Street and Exchange Terrace. That developer does not have a working agreement with a hotel chain, Cianci said, but he has agreed to talk with him.

These developments are further evidence that Rhode Island is on the verge of a hotel building boom. At least six other hotels are in various stages of planning or completion in Providence and other communities.

A pickup in the economy nationally, and in Rhode Island, and high demand for existing hotel rooms apparently have created the interest in more space.

Marsella said hotel construction virtually stopped nationwide in the 1980s because of overbuilding.

"The marketplace has changed [now]. The oversupply has been absorbed," he said. Besides the general economic pickup, the Rhode Island Convention Center's need for more hotel rooms for convention-goers also helps justify more space, according to Marsella.

Although Robbins is the co-owner of the Marriott hotel on Orms Street, the mayor said the hotel that Robbins and Marsella hope to build would not necessarily be a Marriott. They are considering an affiliation with any one of a number of hotel chains, according to Cianci.

Robbins, Marsella and Dennis DeSilva, former general manager of the Holiday Inn at the Crossings, in Warwick, are the general partners of Mainline Partners, which is building one of the six other projects: an all-suites hotel in the West Warwick Industrial Park. The \$5.4-million project, which is scheduled to open in mid-August, is to be a 109-room Fairfield Suites by Marriott.

Marsella and partner Francis Curran own the former Union Station and the parking lot and grassy strip behind it and along Memorial Boulevard. The five buildings that make up the former train station contain corporate offices, the Union Station brewpub and the Capital Grille restaurant.

The downtown site of the Providence fire/police headquarters is under consideration for a 300- to 350-room full-service hotel to be built by a development group that includes Rep. Vincent J. Mesolella Jr., D-North Providence. Mesolella and Cianci confirmed that the

Mesolella group is working with the Hilton hotel chain.

"Hilton expressed a serious interest in coming to Providence and the Providence market," said Mesolella, who makes his living as a developer. Hilton intends to do a feasibility study to see how large a hotel would be justified, they said.

A Hilton representative informally asked the mayor for a 90-day standstill agreement, during which time the city would not negotiate with any other party regarding the site, and Cianci said he would be agreeable if that request were made formal.

No formal request has been made because Hilton is working out undisclosed issues regarding other Hilton franchises in the area, according to Mesolella. Hilton probably won't do a feasibility study until that is resolved, he said.

IF A HOTEL goes up behind the former Union Station, Mesolella said, that won't derail his project. Competition can actually increase the market for hotel rooms, he said, the same way restaurants cluster together because their combined presence will draw more customers to an area.

The state representative said his group would configure an L-shaped building, with a hotel tower and a lower-rise wing for retail. The building would be expandable to 527 rooms, he said. A full-service hotel includes a swimming pool, health club and room service, among other amenities.

In their preliminary negotiations, Cianci and the Mesolella group envision the developers building — at their expense — a new police/fire headquarters on Federal Hill, between Dean Street and the service road on the west side of Route 95. The city would lease that structure and avoid the upfront cost of its construction. Then the developers would erect the hotel.

If financed and built, the six hotels previously disclosed would add more than 650 rooms to the 8,433 already available in Rhode Island.

Besides the Fairfield Suites in West Warwick and the plan for the police/fire site, the other projects are:

■ The \$10-million, 52-room luxury Vanderbilt Hall, opened last month in Newport.

■ A proposed \$5-million, 84-suite hotel off Douglas Pike, in Smithfield.

■ A proposed 150-room Hilton Garden Inn near T.F. Green Airport.

■ A proposed \$8.5-million, 74-unit hotel at Westminster and Mathewson Streets in downtown Providence.

The latter project is on hold for the time being, according to its proponent, real-estate investor Stanley Weiss, until there is more evidence of stepped-up economic activity in that section of downtown. He also needs a public subsidy for his project to proceed.

The Rhode Island Convention Center Authority is a cheerleader for the hotel plans. Convention center officials say that if the city had more rooms available for convention-goers, the center could dramatically boost its business.

There are 854 rooms within walking distance of the convention center, according to a report by researchers from the University of Rhode Island: 363 at the Westin, 217 at the Providence Biltmore Hotel and 274 at the Holiday Inn.

Within the city, there are an additional 481 rooms: 345 at the Marriott and 136 at the Days Hotel.

The convention center, which has fallen far short of projections made when its construction was approved, will have trouble boosting its business unless more hotel rooms are built nearby, the researchers concluded. Convention visitors prefer rooms within walking distance of the center.

Mark Cestari, president of the Providence-Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau, said that although the bureau has no official position, he thought the convention center needed an additional 300 to 500 nearby rooms. The bureau "routinely" turns away large conventions that like everything about the area but insist on having more rooms available close to the center, he said.

More projects coming to downtown: a hotel, grocery and cinema

■ Mayor Cianci will be announcing details of development plans for downtown Providence during the next several weeks.

By GREGORY SMITH
Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE — Developers of a hotel behind the former Union Station downtown will announce their project in a couple of weeks, Mayor Vincent A. Cianci Jr. said yesterday.

Cianci disclosed the news during an announcement of the financing and construction schedule for an ice-and roller-skating rink near the hotel site.

His disclosure confirmed a Journal-Bulletin report of the hotel project last July. A co-owner of the Providence Marriott, Arthur M. Robbins, and a co-owner of the former Union Station, developer Ron Marsella, are members of a partnership that would build the hotel.

The hotel would be situated in the parking lot that serves the Capital Grille restaurant and other tenants of the former Union Station. The site is directly across the street from the rear of the Westin hotel at the Rhode Island Convention Center.

So far Robbins and Marsella have been unwilling to confirm the feasibility of their project or to discuss its details.

The hotel announcement will be one of a series of events and announcements regarding downtown developments in coming weeks, according to Cianci.

Next Wednesday the Boathouse at Waterplace Park, a long-planned upscale restaurant in the clock tower at the park, is scheduled to fully open with a mayoral ribbon-cutting and reception. The Boathouse has been serving meals outdoors on a limited basis over the summer.

Also next week, Cianci is scheduled to announce details of the cinema planned for the corner of Foun-

tain and Mathewson Streets across from the offices of the Journal-Bulletin. The cinema is to be financed by the developers of the Providence Place mall and other corporate interests.

A small supermarket is planned in or near the old Central Business District, too, where the city is strongly encouraging residential development. Most of that area, sometimes loosely referred to as "Down-city," has been recast as an Arts and Entertainment District.

Cianci disclosed the supermarket project, which he said will be announced in about three weeks, but would give no details.

Announcement of the hotel has been held up while he wrangles with the developers over taxes, Cianci said.

But he emphasized that in accordance with long-standing plans for Capital Center, the hotel project will accommodate a concourse beneath Union Station to link Waterplace Park with downtown.

A tunnel beneath the former railroad station was largely walled off, apparently when the station was reconstructed as an office and restaurant complex.

On the Kennedy Plaza side of the station, two sets of glass doors flank a wide stairway that leads down from the street in front of the Cookson America building to the Francis Street bus loop. The concourse would be opened through the doors on the east side of the stairway, according to Nancy L. Derrig, city parks superintendent.

The concourse would lead from the bus loop — where the ice rink is to be built — to what is now an unused office and commercial space beneath the station. Pedestrians would then walk through another concourse beneath Memorial Boulevard to get to and from the park.

Boston Globe

11-11-97

Proposal for Marriott hotel is unveiled in Providence

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PROVIDENCE - A 204-room hotel will join Providence's downtown skyline, boosting the number of rooms to 1,500 in a city eager to lure large conventions, Mayor Vincent Cianci and developers said yesterday.

Ground-breaking for the Courtyard by Marriott, which would be built on what is now a parking lot behind the Capital Grille restaurant, is set for April 1998. The hotel is expected to open in October 1999.

The seven-story hotel would be built on top of a three-story parking garage that is scheduled to open in October 1998. Part of the garage would be underground, according to developer Ron Marsella.

The hotel and parking garage would cost more than \$20 million, said Marsella, who developed the surrounding area, known as Union Station Plaza, an office and restaurant complex built in the city's former train station. The tan-colored brick design of the hotel would blend in with existing Union Station buildings.

The hotel would be within walk-

ing distance of the Rhode Island Convention Center and across from the Providence Place mall, the 150-store retail complex set to open in 1999.

The hotel is the most recently announced project in the city's revitalization, which includes Waterplace Park. Cianci said there are many times when all city hotel rooms are filled. In addition to addressing this need, the design of the property would eliminate a traffic jam at the first main intersection off Interstate 95, Cianci said.

Cianci pointed out that the hotel would cost taxpayers nothing, unlike the publicly financed Westin, which opened in 1994.

Partners in the hotel are Marsella, Arthur Robbins, John Maccliver, and Pittsburgh-based Interstate Hotels, the largest independent hotel management company in the United States.

Several approvals for the project are pending, including those from city council, the Capital Center Commission, the State Historic Preservation Commission, and franchise approval from Marriott Corp.

Developers announce plans for new downtown hotel

■ City leaders are delighted about the project, which will bring an additional 204 hotel rooms to Providence.

By **KEN MINGIS**
Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE — Call it a case of too many visitors and too few hotel rooms, a problem that's gotten so bad in recent months that desperate out-of-towners have even called the mayor's office seeking help finding rooms.

With that room crunch in mind, Mayor Vincent A. Cianci Jr. and a trio of local developers yesterday

announced plans to build a 204-room Courtyard by Marriott hotel downtown.

The seven-story hotel and a 360-car garage will be sandwiched between Memorial Boulevard and Union Station, and will cost between \$20 million and \$24 million to build.

That site is just across Francis Street from the Westin Hotel and almost in the shadow of the Biltmore Hotel, a block away. Construction is slated to begin in the spring, with the garage opening next fall and the hotel opening in October 1999.

"This is all part of a growing mo-

Hotel

Continued from Page One

mentum brought about by the great work of the convention and visitors bureau; great work by the city, and great work by the hotel industry,' Cianci said.

"This is a tremendous indicator of the city's resurgence," he said. "You don't know how important it is to have good hotels in a city."

"We are very delighted," said Arthur Robbins, a partner in the venture and a principal in the Providence Marriott Hotel on Orms Street. "We are going to take the bull by the horns and move the hotel industry up another level."

"The hotel industry really needs rooms, and we need to get rooms now, not in five years," he said. "It's going to be a great development for the city."

"This is another step in the process of 20 to 25 years' worth of development in the city," said Ron Marsella, who was involved in the development of Union Station and the Citizens Plaza bank building.

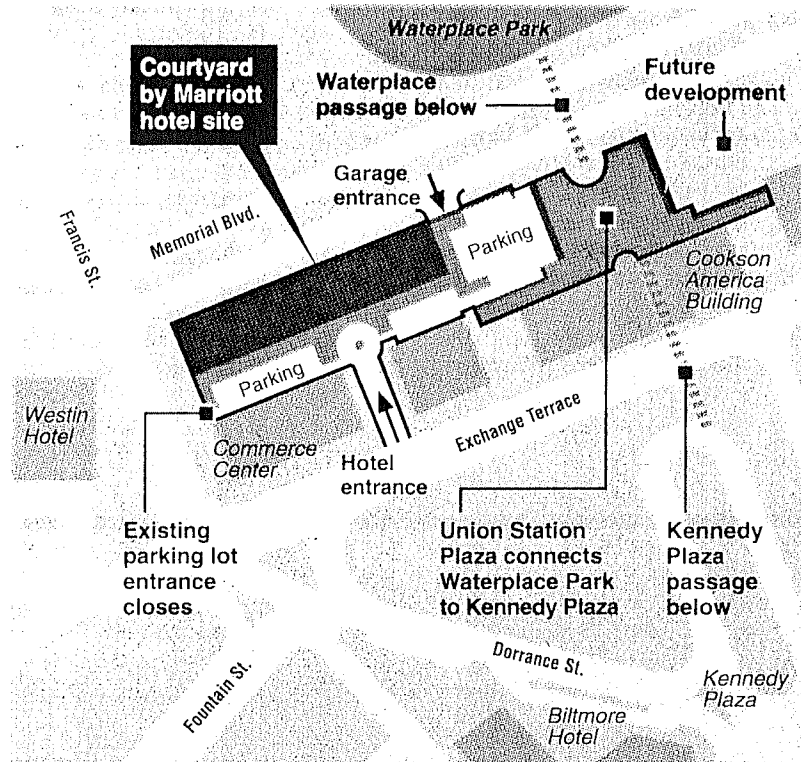
Robbins and Marsella will be joined in the venture by John Maccliver, vice president of Marsella's development company, and by Interstate Hotels, which now operates 229 hotels, including the 350-room Providence Marriott.

"It's fantastic news," said Mark Cestari, executive director of the Providence-Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Within the last 90 days, we have been turning away group business because of the lack of rooms. It's critical that we get more rooms in downtown."

The hotel will be built on a 55,000-square-foot parcel now used as a parking lot for the Capital Grille and for the Union Street Station brew pub.

The existing entrance to the parking area from Francis Street will be closed, and a new driveway will be created to allow traffic to reach the hotel and garage from Exchange Terrace. The garage will also be accessible from Memorial Boulevard.

The developers also plan to build an 18,000-square-foot under-and



Journal-Bulletin/GEORGE SYLVIA

above-ground pedestrian plaza between Kennedy Plaza and Waterplace Park — a move they said would make the hotel easily accessible from downtown.

Although the hotel will not have a full-service restaurant, it will offer many amenities, including an indoor pool, exercise equipment and room service.

Robbins said the rooms would be "five-star quality" and said the lack of a restaurant would not hurt business because the hotel is so close to the Capital Grille, Union Street Station brew pub, and a still-unnamed third restaurant to be located nearby.

Although limited meeting space will be available for business groups, the developers said the new hotel is designed for visitors likely to take advantage of space at the nearby Rhode Island Convention Center.

"These are suites and single rooms that are pretty well-received by businessmen and conventioners," said Marsella.

"What we need are rooms," Robbins said. "We don't need a lot of ex-

hibition space, more restaurants, ballrooms. But there will be some meeting space."

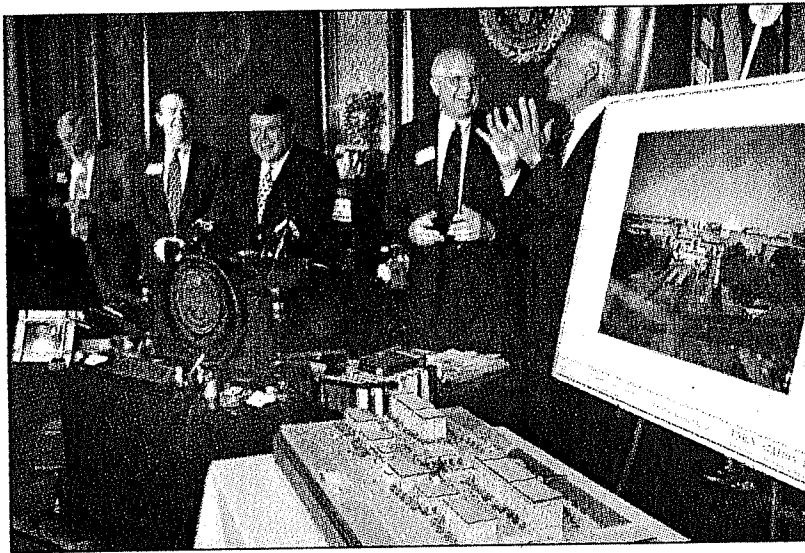
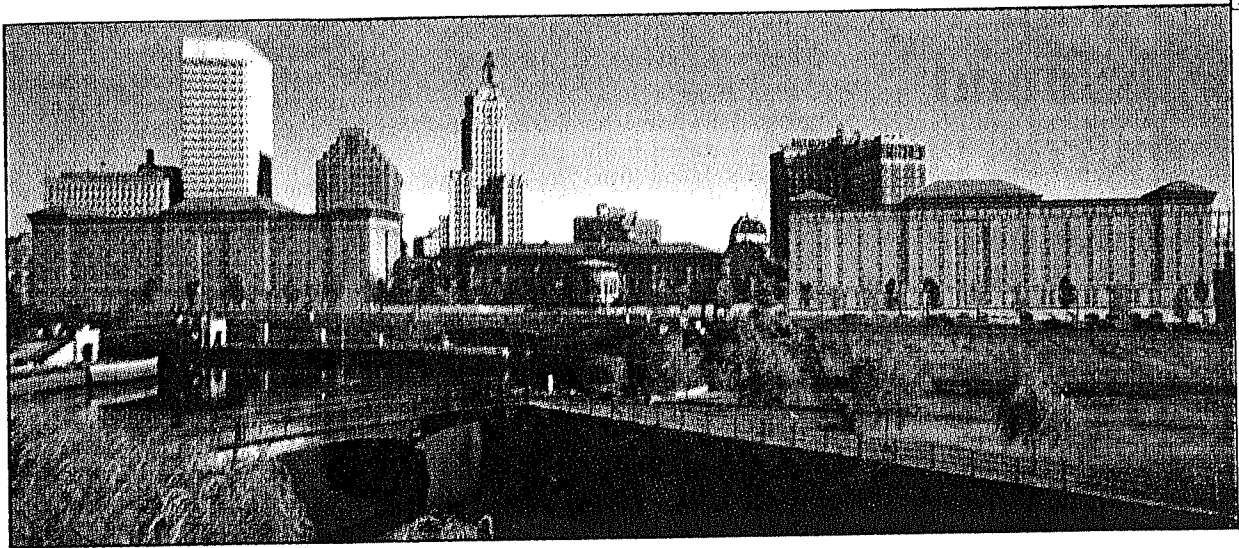
H.V. Collins Corp. has been hired to build the 124,000-square-foot hotel and the 111,000-square-foot garage. Cianci stressed that plans for the facility have been drafted to meet Capital Center Commission requirements, including one that limits the height of buildings in the area.

In fact, Marsella said, initial designs for the hotel are scheduled to be presented to the Capital Center Commission's design-review committee tomorrow. He said he expects the project to receive approval by early next year.

The architect for the project is Robinson, Green & Beretta, of Providence.

Although the city will have no direct financial role in developing the hotel, Cianci said he will seek approval from the City Council of a tax-stabilization plan that sets property taxes on the structure.

Other hotels have received similar stabilization plans, which peg prop-



MORE ROOMS: The photograph of downtown, above, shows the proposed Marriott hotel superimposed at right, in front of the Biltmore, and a future development superimposed at left, in front of the Hospital Trust and Fleet office buildings. At left, yesterday's news conference at Providence City Hall, with Richard Kuehl, architect; John Macliver, of Marsella Development Corp.; Mayor Vincent A. Cianci Jr.; Arthur Robbins, of Robbins Properties, and Ron Marsella, president of Marsella Development Corp. In the foreground is a scale model of the project.

erty taxes to the value of each hotel room. Cianci estimated that even with that plan in place, the new hotel would pay the city more than \$300,000 a year in property taxes.

"It's a good hunk of money," he said.

Cianci predicted that yesterday's announcement would spur other potential hotel developers to move ahead with plans in the coming weeks, though he offered few specifics.

"This is the first of what I hope to be more announcements in the city," he said. "I would expect we'll announce at least one more and maybe two by the end of the year.

It's going to be wonderful."

Those projects, which are in various stages of discussion, include plans by a New York firm to convert the Masonic Temple into an upscale restaurant, and possible hotels in downtown that would be built by the Radisson and Doubletree hotel chains.

"We can't get the larger conventions now because there's no rooms," Cianci said. "For all these hotels to do well, we need even more. One breeds another. It's symbiotic."

The new hotel may be linked by a bridge over Francis Street to the Westin Hotel, he said.

Journal-Bulletin/KATHY BORCHERS