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The \$300 million facelift of WMATA's longtime headquarters moves forward

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The Jackson Graham Building has been the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's headquarters for more than 50 years.

The planned renovation of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's longtime headquarters building is moving forward after its developer had flirted with, then abandoned, the idea of converting the 1970s-era property into multifamily housing.

The U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, which reviews major development projects in downtown D.C., has approved permits for demolition and structural work, allowing the \$300 million redevelopment of the Jackson Graham Building, at 600 Fifth St. NW, to move ahead. WMATA has selected Stonebridge and the New York-based Rockefeller Group to redevelop the eight-story, 360,000-square-foot building, which has been its headquarters for 50 years.

WMATA is moving its headquarters to 300 7th St. SW as part of a consolidation of its offices. That move is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

The Jackson Building sits on prime real estate between Capital One Arena and the National Building Museum, close to both the Gallery Place and Judiciary Square Metro stations. WMATA still owns the Fifth Street property, but Rockefeller Group and Stonebridge control it under a 99-year ground lease.

The building is set to undergo a complete redesign that includes expanding it to 12 stories and 422,000 square feet by 2025. Pickard Chilton is the project's architect.

The developers have been tweaking the project for over a year as they aim bring a more modern look to the Brutalist-style building, according to notes from Commission on Fine Arts Secretary Thomas Luebke. The latest drawings, submitted for final approvals at a June 8 meeting, show three or four large retail pads on the ground floor of the building, along with a fitness area.

In a meeting of the DowntownDC Business Improvement District this week, Hilary Goldfarb, senior managing director for Rockefeller Group, said the development team is confident that the refurbished building will attract tenants, despite downtown's high vacancy rate, because newly constructed projects are generally performing well. The developers haven't disclosed any anchor tenant leases for the building.

"This is a very bifurcated market for office space, where the best product performs the best," Goldfarb said. "I think a lot of underlying market dynamics still favor this building in spite of some difficult macro trends."

The developers had considered converting the building for residential use, but concluded that its floor plates are too wide and that renovation would be too costly.

"It's a fat, Brutalist building," Goldfarb said.



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