

News Crush:

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City Hall East To Become the Dynamic Ponce City Market!

On the docket: a festive food market for local chefs, local and national retail, loft offices and residences, and rooftop garden

By Nancy Staab

Photo of the Mayor and Matt Bronfman by Ben Rose

THIS JUST IN: On Monday, July 11, Mayor Kasim Reed announced that the iconic City Hall East complex had been purchased by Jamestown Properties, the developers behind the acclaimed White Provision project, and would be converted and renamed as Ponce City Market.



Mayor Kasim Reed (right) hands the keys to the building to Matt Bronfman

On the docket for **Ponce City Market**: An estimated 300,000 square feet of high-quality national and local retail vendors, including a festive food market and plenty of other spaces for local chefs and their restaurants, watering holes and coffee shops. (We spotted chef **Jay Swift** of **4th and Swift** at the press conference and **Alisa Barry** of **Bella Cucina** recently praised Jamestown in the press: perhaps hints of vendors to come?). In addition, the plan calls for 300,000 to 500,000 square feet of quality loft-life office spaces; a few hundred-thousand square feet of residential spaces; and perhaps, according to **Katharine Kelly**, CEO of partner firm **Green Street Properties**, a green-minded, organic rooftop garden to help supply the restaurants and marketplace below. Phase One is slated for completion in 2014.

The Ponce de Leon corridor, where City Hall East sits, intersects with the Old Fourth Ward, Midtown, Inman Park and the Poncey Highland neighborhoods--occupying prime property that perhaps hasn't lived up to its full potential recently. The area's glory-day past as a Coney Island style amusement park, home of the Atlanta Crackers baseball park, and site of the Southeast HQ for Sears Robuck & Company, that glossy symbol of middle-class affluence, which arrived with fanfare in 1926, has been eclipsed by a more spotty modern-day history of urban development. Even the brick Sears building, taken over by the Atlanta government in 1991 and renamed City Hall East, remained a rather sleepy, half-empty building. Despite a new Whole Foods nearby as well as the national HQ for Home Depot, mixed in with beloved local institutions like Paris on Ponce, Mary Mac's Tea Room and the Plaza Theater, urban progress on Ponce has been spotty at best. The announcement of the adaptive reuse and rebranding of City Hall East's behemoth red brick structure as **Ponce City Market** symbolizes a new renaissance for Ponce.



The signature Sears tower portion of the building

White Provision cemented the Westside Market's already-established reputation as a cutting-edge design and dine destination, so if developers **Jamestown Properties** can work the same magic on Ponce City Market, this nexus will soon become a dynamic urban spot. The developers also plan to take advantage of the nearby **Atlanta BeltLine** project already in progress, and the connectivity to its future green spaces, to create a vibrant oasis in the city. Gone will be the eyesore parking decks. Instead, they will bring most of the

parking into the interior structures of the building. Remaining intact: the architectural envelope and bones of this landmark 1920's building in accordance with the National Historic Registry. The original restored maple wood floors, steel framed windows, Palladian tower windows and scroll-like friezes will lend charm to this historic industrial space. The building was designed by the Chicago architectural firm Nimmons and Fellows, the same architects known for the famed Sears Tower in Chicago. According to documents from the historic preservation submission for this building, when the Sears building debuted in 1926, many local wits dubbed it "Sears Folly" due to its tremendous size, signature tower, and location outside of downtown proper.

The restoration and re-adaptation of this "folly" is a mammoth undertaking. At 2.1 million square feet, it's the most comprehensive adaptive reuse project in Atlanta's history, but one that locally-based Jamestown promises it is well-equipped to steward. Some of their past projects included the famed Chelsea Market in New York City; a popular shopping corridor on M Street in Georgetown, Washington D.C.; Warehouse Row in Chattanooga, Tennessee; and of course White Provision, which won a 2010 "Development of Excellence" designation from the Urban Land Institute Atlanta Chapter. Some of the firm's other projects include Union Square and Post Street in San Francisco. The purchase of the building cost the firm \$27 million and cummatively represents a \$180 million investment by the company. In partnership with locally-based Green Street Properties, the project will also emphasize high standards of preservation and sustainability.

A hundred or more members of the press were led ceremoniously up to the rooftop of the East City Hall complex via its impressive freight elevators for the historic announcement of the real estate deal. **Mayor Kasim Reed**, who has championed the project since his first days in office, likened this day to "winning a Grammy." He called Ponce City Market an "important, critical and catalytic investment in Atlanta's future," as he symbolically handed over his "party favors"-- the ring of keys to the building to **Jamestown Properties Managing Director Matt Bronfman**. Reed also praised Jamestown Properties for its "devotion to quality, history and its intuitive understanding of urban environments."

Brian McGowan, the newly-installed CEO of **Atlanta Development Authority** cited this project as "a great example of how private projects like this will get the economy back on track." Incidentally, Ponce City Market is one of only two city sites currently approved by the ADA to offer businesses a state tax credit of \$3,500 for each new employee position it creates. District Councilman **Kwanza Hall**, also in attendance as a representative of the Old Fourth Ward, was no doubt justly pleased with this announcement.



James Oxendine with JamestownProperties' Lee Wright and Michael Phillips

Standing at a wooden file cabinet podium (a relic from the old Sears building), Jamestown's Bronfman thanked the mayor for his "intelligence, leadership and vision" and commented on "the element of public trust" involved in these kinds of endeavors, stating, "We are honored to restore City Hall East. It is a very special project for us."

Jamestown Properties Managing Director Michael Phillips, an Atlanta native, took to the podium last and spoke of "using industrial retail to attract strong, forward-thinking companies that can be catalysts for jobs in the city." He also compared the envisioned market place to the nation's three existing ones: Pike's Market in Seattle, Chelsea Market in New York City, and the Ferry Market in San Francisco, adding, "Atlanta will be the fourth."

In his closing comments Philips announced a unique **fundraising event** to be held **October 1, 2011**, which would allow Atlantans to tour the iconic building one last time before the two-plus years of construction and restoration begin. The event, which will benefit **Georgia Organics** and the **Atlanta BeltLine**, will feature food from 12 noted Atlanta restaurants and live music by the **Indigo Girls** and **Shawn Mullins**.

Tickets for the Oct. 1 benefit will be available via Empire Tickets, www.empiretickets.com For more information on Ponce City Market visit: www.poncecitymarket.com or www.Jamestownproperties.com



A rendering of Ponce City Market

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