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Wahkonsa: The old is new again

Leaders hope renovation is first of many

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An approximately \$4 million renovation has restored the Wahkonsa Manor in downtown Fort Dodge to its historical look.

Several Fort Dodge city leaders hope that the project will be the first of several in an ongoing effort to revitalize the downtown area.

Completed in March, the Wahkonsa's renovation was highlighted during an open house Wednesday.

In 2007, Dominion Development & Acquisition of Plymouth, Minn., purchased the Wahkonsa.

The building, located at 927 Central Ave., has 76 government-subsidized apartments that are home to low-income senior citizens and disabled people. All of the apartments were renovated during the course of the project.

Built as a luxury hotel in 1910, Wahkonsa Manor was recently added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Part of the project involved restoring the building's exterior to its 1950s look with the addition of small balconies and a sign mounted on its corner at Central Avenue and 10th Street.

Article Photos



The Wahkonsa Manor, at the corner of 10th Street and Central Avenue in Fort Dodge, recently underwent an approximately \$4 million renovation.

Mark Moorhouse, a project partner with Dominion, highlighted cooperation between his firm and the city of Fort Dodge as integral to the project.

Getting the structure on the Historic Register allowed Dominion to tap into credits available for such projects, Moorhouse said.

As a result, more work was economically feasible, he said.

"We put in \$85,000 of renovation into each of the homes," Moorhouse said. "It really increased the amount of infrastructure work we were able to do ... we've restored the building so that it should be in good shape for at least another 50 years."

The Wahkonsa project demonstrates the hidden assets in the downtown area and the opportunity for investment they represent, said Fort Dodge Mayor Terry Lutz.

"This is another example of what we hope to see happen as an offshoot of the downtown Camiros study," said Lutz, referring to a 2008 plan that laid out an outline for future development.

In the future, the entire downtown area could see placement on the historic register, said Dennis Plautz, director of the Department of Business Affairs and Community Growth.

Plans to conduct a design study for the development and restoration of other downtown buildings are under discussion, said Plautz. The study would be financed in part by the Self Supported Municipal Improvement District, he said.

That district is a roughly 33-block downtown area in which property owners pay an extra tax to finance improvements in the district.

Such redevelopment plans make properties more attractive to investors, Moorhouse said.

"If a city sets a vision, it helps us in our process to determine if we can make a valid redevelopment plan work," he said.

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