

New hostel planned for historic Stuart Street building



(Courtesy Hostelling International)

The façade of the Dill Building will remain largely unchanged by the extensive interior renovations.

By Jeremy C. Fox, Town Correspondent

A historic building will soon see new life, and more young visitors to Boston will have access to affordable, environmentally friendly accommodations.

Next month, Hostelling International Boston will begin construction on a new facility in the Dill Building at 25 Stuart St., which will replace the nonprofit organization's 27-year-old hostel on Hemenway Street in the Fenway. The new hostel's 55,500 square feet will be nearly double the size of the existing space, allowing the organization to accommodate more than 450 guests a night and expand its community programs

Suffolk Construction is scheduled to begin work on the building at the end of January, after a groundbreaking ceremony with Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino on Jan. 13. Hostelling International expects to open the new hostel in April or May of 2012, at which time the Fenway location will close.

Built in 1886, the six-story Dill Building — two doors down from Jacob Wirth Restaurant — is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. As such, its façade will remain largely untouched by the renovations, while the interior will be greatly altered, said Deborah Ruhe, executive director of Hostelling International's Eastern New England branch.

“Since it's essentially a gut renovation of the building, we're going to be able to do a lot of green design and make it environmentally sustainable,” Ruhe said. **“We are aiming to be a model of green tourism and of green development.”**

The designs by Boston architectural firms Bergmeyer Associates and Stegman+Associates include new, energy-efficient windows, solar panels, a green roof, a green elevator and solar hot water heating. Their goal is to be the first LEED-certified hostel in the country.

(LEED, which stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is an international standard for high energy efficiency and low environmental impact awarded by the U.S. Green Building Council.)

While part of the building is already empty, two of the upper floors are currently occupied by a tenant who will leave in the coming months. On the first floor, an existing Citibank branch will remain, while the Red Cross office will move at the end of this month to make way for the new hostel's lobby, which will include a coffee bar and a community room.

The second floor, where large windows make for a bright, sunny space, will be used as the cooking and dining area, while the four upper floors will provide dormitory-style accommodations for travelers and a few private rooms.

Ruhe said her organization had reached out to neighborhood residents and business owners to get their support for the project, and most welcomed it.

"I think people understand that what we're doing is bringing in literally tens of thousands of international travelers every year, and young people who many times are visiting Boston for the first time," Ruhe said.

Ruhe said travelers of any age may stay at the hostel, but most are in their 20's, and 60 to 65 percent come from abroad. She stressed that the hostel permits no alcohol and no smoking inside and that they had a long history of accommodating young people without incidents.

"We had the police sergeant for the district talk to community groups and say, 'You know, I checked with the police district where they've been operating for 26 years, and there's been no real incident. They're good citizens,'" Ruhe said.

Hostelling International has been able to secure most of the funds for the \$44 million renovation through private financing, tax credits and owner equity — including the sale of their existing facility — but they are currently engaged in a capital campaign to complete the task.

"I have to say, it's very exciting to be doing a project like this during these economic times," Ruhe said. "We are fortunate that we've put together a financing package that includes federal and state tax credit programs."

The project will receive federal tax credits through the New Markets Tax Credit program, established in 2000 to help stimulate economic growth in low-income areas, and both federal and state tax credits for preservation of historic buildings.

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