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HEADLINE: Waterfront hotel to get new look; Renovation: A \$ 3 million overhaul is being planned for the Inn at Pier Five to add more options for dining and entertainment.

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BODY:

THE BUILDING at the southern tip of Pier 5 in Baltimore has always looked a bit like the Harborplace shopping pavilions, except that it has guest rooms on top.

Next year it's also likely to function more like the Harborplace pavilions, after a \$ 3 million overhaul designed to add more options for dining and entertainment.

On Tuesday, owners of the 72-room Inn at Pier Five will close it for three months to launch the first renovation there since the four-story building opened in June 1989 at a reported cost of \$ 20 million.

The hotel's original owners, the Harrison Organization of Tilghman Island, lost control of it in 1993 after defaulting on a city-backed loan and failing to pay more than \$ 1 million in property taxes.

But Otis Warren Jr., president of the group that bought the hotel from the city in May for \$ 5.5 million, said he's confident it can be a success -- with appropriate fine-tuning.

"It's the only hotel in the city that's right on the waterfront," Mr. Warren said. "It's the best location in town. But it's an upside-down building. It has more restaurant space than guest rooms. If the restaurants are not making money, it won't be profitable."

Mr. Warren said the group plans to open three restaurants and a nightclub as part of the renovation, which will be complete around April 1. He said he cannot name the operators yet but is close to reaching an agreement with them. Two banquet halls and more conference rooms for group meetings are planned.

Pure Five Inc., the investment group that owns the building, was selected over 13 other potential operators. The group also plans to reduce the number of guest rooms from 72 to about 67 by converting rooms with no water views into other uses, such as a gym. All of the remaining guest rooms will be upgraded with new carpeting and other furnishings, and the lobby will be redecorated.

Mr. Warren said the group plans to complete the renovation within the shell of the original building at 711 Eastern Ave. He said the key to adding activities is reconfiguring some of the interior space, including an atrium that contains a three-quarter-scale replica of a skipjack called the Lady H in the center.

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The skipjack was created as part of the Harrison family's theme of "bringing the Eastern Shore to Baltimore." Mr. Warren said that the boat model will be given back to the builders and that side rooms off the atrium will be expanded into the central space.

Mr. Warren said that the inn employs about 17 people now and that the staff likely will grow to more than 100 when the inn reopens. Besides drawing out-of-town visitors, he said, the inn will attempt to be a meeting spot for local groups such as the Johns Hopkins Hospital, the National Aquarium in Baltimore and the Columbus Center.

The architects for the renovation are Maureen Haines of Mackerel Sky Architecture and Peter Charles of Charles Associates. One of the interior designers will be Dan Proctor of Kirk Designs of Baltimore.

Mr. Warren said his group eventually would like to get permission to increase the number of guest rooms at the hotel by expanding the building to the east.

That could happen only if the city agreed to sell or lease land now used for the entrance to the Pier 6 Concert Pavilion. Over the years, planners have talked about moving that facility off Pier 6, possibly to the Allied Signal property between the Inner Harbor and Fells Point, to make way for other development.

For now, Mr. Warren said he and his partners plan to concentrate on making their operation a success from the day it reopens. "We hope we can demonstrate that we are such an asset that the city will do whatever needs to be done to allow us to expand," he said.

Abel Wolman house to be student center

The former residence of Abel Wolman, a world-renowned sanitary engineering expert who died in 1989, will become offices and meeting space for the Jewish College Services agency.

Baltimore's Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals this month approved a request from the Johns Hopkins University, which owns the building at 3213 N. Charles St., to use part of it for office space and to build an inconspicuous fire stair to satisfy local building codes.

Designed by Laurence Hall Fowler, the 1938 building will be renovated for the student group, an affiliate of the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore.

It also intends to use the building for classes, religious services and social activities.

The organization serves college students not only at Hopkins but also at other colleges in the region.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO, PATRICK SANDOR : SUN STAFF, Temporary closing: The Inn at Pier Five will close Tuesday for renovation.

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