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DEAL OF THE WEEK

Boston Rocks a New Hotel

Music-Themed Verb Hotel Near Fenway Park to Open This Summer

By CRAIG KARMIN

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The Verb hotel will celebrate the music scene that used to thrive around Boston's Fenway Park. *Elkus Manfredi Architects*

A Boston developer and a veteran of Four Seasons Hotel & Resorts are teaming up to convert one of the first Howard Johnson motels into a music-themed hotel near Fenway Park.

The Verb hotel, set to open this summer, aims to celebrate the rock-era club scene that used to thrive in the baseball park's neighborhood. Acts including the Who and Janis Joplin played now-defunct venues like the Boston Tea Party and Psychedelic Supermarket.

The hotel's walls will be adorned by fliers, posters and record covers from that era through the early 1990s grunge period. Headlines from the recently closed Boston Phoenix alternative weekly newspaper also will be on display.

"Baseball is the dominant theme in the history of Fenway Park," said Steve Samuels, principal of Samuels & Associates, which is developing the \$32 million project with Weiner Ventures and Spot-On Ventures.

"But as we began to dig deeper, we saw a great culture of art, music, publishing, great rock 'n' roll clubs and radio stations."

The hotel is part of a major redevelopment of the blocks surrounding the ballpark, where gas stations, car dealerships and other single-tenant buildings are giving way to high-rise residential buildings, office towers

and new stores. Other projects include a 342-unit residential tower being built by Abbey Group, another Boston developer that is a co-owner of the Celtics professional basketball team. That \$180 million development is scheduled to open next year.

Mr. Samuels has invested \$1.5 billion in projects in the area including new luxury apartments and the expansion of Landmark Center, a mixed-use project that will include 550 apartments and the first Wegmans gourmet supermarket in a major U.S. city. A Cleveland native who moved to Boston 1984, Mr. Samuels is best known for efforts to redevelop the Fenway area—and for producing the George Clooney film "Michael Clayton." He said he plans to invest another \$1 billion in projects in the neighborhood.

The new hotel will open at a time when the Boston lodging market, like other major metropolitan areas, has been rebounding after a collapse in leisure and business travel during the recession. Boston's revenue per available room rose 5.6% in 2013 over the previous year, according to Smith Travel Research.

Despite its recent makeover, there are few lodging options in the Fenway Park area. Marriott International Inc. 's Residence Inn, which opened in 2013, was the first new hotel built in the area in decades and offers rooms overlooking the ballpark. A stay there this Saturday night starts at \$399 a night.

Mr. Samuels and his partners acquired the motel late last year for around \$23 million, he said. The property was completed in 1959 by local real-estate investor Bob Sage, who opened it as the Fenway Motor Lodge before converting it to a Howard Johnson.

With no hotel experience, Mr. Samuels joined with Spot-On Ventures, a hotel owner and developer led by Robin Brown. The former general manager of Boston's Four Seasons hotel became a co-developer of the city's Mandarin Oriental before starting his own hotel company.

At first, they planned to tear down the motel and build a 17-story modern hotel.

But Mr. Samuels said he soon changed his mind. "We decided that we loved the building, the bones, the way it sat on the site," he said. He also appreciated the costs savings, figuring he could reposition the hotel for \$9 million. Crescent Hotels & Resorts, an independent hotel operator with 88 properties and 19,000 rooms in the U.S. and Canada, will manage the property.

While the Verb will maintain some of the characteristics of its motel roots, including parking lots next to the rooms, the developers are adding modern touches and say rooms will start this summer at about \$250 a night. The hotel will feature 300 square-foot rooms, high thread-count linens with goose-down pillows and 47-inch flat-screen TVs.

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