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Long-delayed Marriott has its day at Courthouse

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File / Joanne S. Lawton

Room service: Jim Donohoe, left, and Christopher Bruch, are finally ready to start work on a Marriott Residence Inn in Arlington County near the Court House Metro station.

The final step to complete the west end of Arlington's Courthouse Plaza -- a project approved in 1984 -- is finally under way.

The **Donohoe Cos.** started construction Sept. 19 on a 140,000-square-foot, 176-room **Marriott Residence Inn** on Clarendon Boulevard near the Court House Metro station. The \$40 million hotel will open in spring 2009, some 23 years after it was originally envisioned and one year later than the current developers were hoping for.

"It has maybe taken longer than it typically does," said Bob Donohoe, development director for The Donohoe Cos. "But we feel like we've got the best project we could have."

Courthouse Plaza's original developer, Arlington-based **Charles E. Smith Commercial Realty**, now **Vornado**/Charles E. Smith, never built a hotel. D.C.'s Concord Partners jumped into the fray in 1996, but the company never lined up financing. That deal eventually died in 2002.

In 2004, Arlington County, which owns the land, received six responses to a request for qualifications for the hotel project. Donohoe won, signed a 75-year lease agreement the following year and became the third developer for the project since 1984.

But even Donohoe's project wasn't immune to delays. The county required Donohoe to undergo a new site-planning process because the original plan was now decades old. Approval came in early 2006.

Then, the addition of a ramp for the hotel's garage was needed to meet requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act, which was enacted six years after the first site-plan approval. As a result, the hotel is opening in 2009 rather than 2008.

The new hotel will be managed by **Donohoe Hospitality Services**, a subsidiary of Donohoe. As part of the plan, the Marriott will include 185 spaces for underground parking as well as about 10,000 square feet for a 6,000-square-foot upscale restaurant and one other retail option.

Capital Restaurant Concepts, owners of the D.C. restaurant Georgia Brown's, had signed a letter of intent two years ago with Donohoe to open a second location outside the District on the site. But it has since rescinded the letter, said Paul Cohn, co-founder and senior executive officer.

Cohn indicated his group would watch how the project progresses and perhaps revisit it.

Regardless of which businesses fill the space, the Marriott's presence is likely to give the area a boost.

"By getting the hotel developed and anchoring the western end of Courthouse Plaza, it will really help the existing buildings," said Tom Newman, director of the real estate development group for Arlington County Economic Development. "We'll now have traffic going the length of the plaza, so it should really help the retail at that end, which as been difficult over the years."

"We're just glad we've started" on the project, he said.