

Jimmy's site being reborn on waterfront

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By Thomas C. Palmer Jr.

Jimmy's Haborside Restaurant, a landmark on the South Boston Waterfront for decades, will be replaced by two mostly glass buildings with two large restaurants and a waterside public plaza.

But it appears that Jimmy's, since 1955 a dining destination for business folks, pols, and tourists that was demolished earlier this year, won't return.

Cresset Development, which recently signed a 75-year lease for the site, filed building plans with the state this week for 69,000 square feet of restaurant and office space at the Northern Avenue location and will separately submit plans to the Boston Redevelopment Authority today.

Ed Nardi, Cresset president, said the initial effort to get a Jimmy's at the location have not been successful and the restaurant now is not in the "initial mix." However, he said Cresset has no plans "to exclude them from eventual participation."

Kim Doulos, granddaughter of restaurant founder Jimmy Doulos, did not return calls for comment.

She previously has talked about the family's intention to renovate the old place or open a new restaurant at the location Jimmy Doulos died in 1981, and two generations of his family ran the restaurant until it closed in January 2006/ The Douloses were partners at one time with Cresset, but they are no longer officially involved in redevelopment plans.

Nardi said he continues to talk with the Douloses, who have said they still own the huge red "Jimmy's" sign that lit up the waterfront for decades when little else did. But he and officials of the Massachusetts Port Authority, which owns the site, said the cost of building restaurants has skyrocketed, making it harder for independents such as the Douloses to compete against large national chains.

The old restaurant, added onto over the years since teenage immigrant Jimmy Doulos opened the Liberty Cafeteria in 1924, had about 30,000 square feet of space and 325 seats on two floors.

"They were pioneers," said Patrick B. Moscaritolo, president of the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau. "When you think of Jimmy's and Anthony's, today's waterfront looks nothing like it." Anthony's Pier 4 is still doing business nearby and is slated to be redeveloped.

“The irony is that as the area is burgeoning with new businesses and opportunities, a historic element that made the waterfront a place to go unfortunately looks like it won’t be there,” he said.

Cresset’s plans include two modern buildings – one two-story, one four-story – that will be edged on the waterfront by an extension of the city’s Harborwalk.

In contrast to the old Jimmy’s building, a 420-foot-long warehouse-like structure that walled off access to the harbor, the new buildings will be spaced to allow waterviews from two key locations – at the ends of D Street and Harbor View Lane. The buildings’ glass exteriors will also give them a transparency that will add to the feeling of openness.

“The site is unique in its own right,” said Nardi. “One of our guiding principles was making it more accessible to the public.”

The new buildings, designed by David Manfredi of Elkus Manfredi Architects of Boston, will house one large restaurant each. Nardi said he has spoken to McCormick & Schmick’s, as well as others, about being tenants.

A spokeswoman for McCormick & Schmick could not say if the chain had plans for the old Jimmy’s location in Boston, but she confirmed that the company has the rights for the use of the Jimmy’s name.

The top two floors of the taller building, closer to Fish Pier, will house office space, with one of two other, smaller restaurants also taking ground-floor space, Nardi said. The Jimmy’s site is being reborn just as the South Boston Waterfront finally is coming to live, after decades of promised development.

Across the street from the site is developer Joe Fallon’s Park Lane Seaport residential complex, with three new restaurants. Morton’s opened a second steak house in Boston just yesterday, in the World Trade Center East tower – only a short distance from where Jimmy Doulos’s ship-shaped bar served drinks.

In addition, Sebastians has opened up on Seaport Boulevard, and a new fine dining establishment is planned at the Marriot renaissance Boston Hotel, which opens in January nearby at D and Congress streets.

“In terms of retail amenities, there’s a lot more than there was 15 months ago,” said Lowell L. Richards III, the Port Authority’s chief development officer.

Richards wouldn’t say how much Cresset is paying in rent, except that it is more than the \$200,000 a year the Port Authority got from Jimmy’s in recent years. The rent will be based on revenues.

“If he does well, we do well,” Richards said.

State and city approvals for Cresset's plans could come as early as spring, when construction could begin.

"The dream would be one restaurant there by Sail Boston in July 2009," when the tall ships are slated to visit the Hub again, Richards said.