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## Developer Purchases Old Hecht's Warehouse

Historic Structure to be Renovated for Retail

By [Alejandro Lazo](#)

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Monday, December 17, 2007; Page D01

The landmark Hecht Co. distribution center in Northeast Washington has been bought by a Philadelphia developer who plans to incorporate the historic structure into a new retail hub off New York Avenue.

The developer, Patriot Equities, said it plans to preserve the six-story art deco building as it knocks down a sprawling one-story warehouse next door to make way for a shopping center anchored by big-box retailers such as Target, Wal-Mart and Costco.

In a second phase of construction, the company plans to renovate the '30s-era Hecht's building to accommodate additional shops or possibly light manufacturing or warehouse storage, said Erik E. Kolar, president and chief executive of Patriot Equities.

"That property is a historic property, and we will retain its original facade," he said. "It was very pioneering in its original design."

Patriot Equities' plans for the building come at a difficult time for development in the region. Lenders have been growing stingier since the start of a credit crunch this summer, putting projects under higher levels of scrutiny.

The Hecht's building was put under contract in June, and its closing was delayed by about a month because of the tightened lending environment, Kolar said. Kolar did not disclose the sale price or terms of the deal but said the developer had secured financing to see its plans through to completion.

The new development could complement a \$1.1 billion plan by District developer Jim Abdo to bring thousands of residential units and retail shops to the area. Finding investors for that project, Arbor Place, has been made more difficult by the current credit squeeze, Abdo said in an interview.

The fact that Patriot Equities was able to close on its deal was a positive sign, Abdo added.

"We were very, very, very pleased to hear that they got their deal completed," Abdo said. "It re-affirms what we knew all along: [New York Avenue NE] is a very important corridor for the city."

The city has been pushing for retail in the area.

"For economic development it means jobs, services and a tax base that the city will be able to capture," said Keith J. Sellars, senior vice president for real estate development and retail for the nonprofit Washington D.C. Economic Partnership. "Whether it is a Target, a Best Buy, a

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Patriot Equities plans to retain the original facade of the Hecht distribution center on New York Avenue. (Patriot Equities)

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Costco, or any one of those other big boxes, people won't have to leave the city."

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Sellers has been promoting the warehouse site, at 1401 New York Ave. NE, as an ideal spot for large retailers because of its high visibility from the road and because it is not near residential neighborhoods.

Kolar said he was in discussions with several national retail chains but did not name them.

If successful, the redevelopment would fulfill one of Hecht's original ambitions for the site. The retailer deliberately gave the building some art deco flair when it was built in 1937 because it hoped to one day convert it into a

department store, said Richard Striner, a history professor at Washington College and co-author of the book "Washington Deco."

While that plan never came to fruition, the jazzy, streamlined facade made the building a signature work of art deco architecture in the District. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994, the warehouse was closed after Macy's bought the Hecht's chain in 2006.

"It was obvious from the beginning that this was one of the most important art deco buildings in the greater Washington area," Striner said. "I don't think any sane person would dispute that."

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