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Rethinking an Historic Renovation

Lower **Chapel** rehab recast as rental housing

By: Karen Singer

Business New
Haven

An historic building at **804 Chapel Street** in New Haven won't be converted into condominiums after all.

But the three-story structure, built in 1921 and designed by architect R.W. Foote, will soon have five apartments, according to William Christian, co-developer with his partner, Hasni (Jeff) Ghazali. The duo are best known for having created downtown restaurants Bentara and Central Steakhouse.

"We have decided to do a historic renovation on the existing building, which prohibits us from doing condos," Christian explains.

The apartments should be completed in about 12 months, and will include studios, one-bedrooms and one two-bedroom unit ranging from 500 to 1,400 square feet.

They'll feature "high-end kitchens and bathrooms," says Christian. Monthly rents will range from \$1,200 to \$2,500. "It's going to be a 'green' renovation, so we may reuse some of the materials we take out of the first floor," he adds.

The 2,500-square-foot space on the first floor, at the intersection of Orange **Street**, will remain in retail use.

Recent changes in Connecticut tax law prompted Christian and his partner to rethink their concept for the building, which had included the possibility of adding as many as four floors.

"The state instituted a 25-percent tax credit in addition to the federal 20-percent tax credit" available for historic renovations, Christian explains. To retrofit the existing building, they estimated "the cost would be more than the market would



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bear," and the historic renovation also will be very expensive relative to projected earnings.

"We felt it was such a significant building we really wanted to maintain the façade," adds Christian, who considers the structure as a "gateway" to downtown's Ninth Square neighborhood.

Renovation work already is underway. Metal panels, which in the 1950s covered the terra cotta tiles originally adorning the building's exterior, have been removed, and damaged tiles are being replaced.