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Government building gets new lease on life

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I hope someday — it probably will be much later this century — people like John Harvey of **City Vision Ministries** are recognized in some kind of Preservation Hall of Fame.

His organization is taking the old City Hall in Kansas City, Kan. — a fine example of the civic pride our ancestors used to express in their public buildings — and is giving it new life as an apartment building. Between 1911 and 1972, the Renaissance Revival-style building at Sixth Street and Ann Avenue was the colorful political hub of Kansas City, Kan.

Then it was closed for more “modern” digs and allowed to slowly deteriorate. Several attempts to convert it for commercial use failed. By the time Harvey's organization was allowed a shot at it, the roof was so leaky there were cattails growing from it. Water had poured down the inner walls, destroying some of the ornate plaster moldings inside.

“People got a good look at how rough this old girl was,” Harvey said. “Another year or two, it probably would have been beyond repair.”

Now, there are workers putting up drywall and kitchen cabinets to create 44 apartments that will rent from \$400 to \$1,000 per month. There are 32 people on a list who want first call when leasing begins this June. The penthouse, located where the former women's jail once took guests, already is reserved. The iron bars of an old cell wall still remain.

Many of those interested in living there are downtown workers in nearby federal and city government buildings, Harvey said. Some are attracted to the idea of urban living at much less cost than that being charged across the way in downtown Kansas City, but still within a 10-minute drive.

The most spectacular apartment will occupy the space of the old city commission chamber. Bedrooms will be installed in the balcony where citizens once snoozed or shouted, depending on the agenda. The original wood floors of the high-ceilinged meeting room will be buffed to a shine.

The architect for the renovation is Mark Curfman of **Raphael Architects**. The original architect was the firm **Rose & Peterson**, whose other Kansas City, Kan., masterpiece, the old Carnegie Library, is now only a fading memory.

Harvey said the apartment building, once completed, will help bring life back to downtown. Someday, maybe 10, 20 or 50 years from now, people may look at it and recognize a valuable part of their community's soul was saved by City Vision Ministries.