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# Construction begins next week on lofts in old City Hall

By MARK WIEBE The Kansas City Star

After about an eight-month delay, the conversion of the historic Kansas City, Kan., City Hall into loft apartments is scheduled to begin.

The president of City Vision Ministries in Kansas City, Kan., the project's nonprofit developer, said Wednesday that construction would start next week.

"Everybody thought we couldn't get there," John Harvey said. "But just getting everybody (involved in the project) to hold hands takes awhile."

Harvey said initial plans called for the old City Hall to open as a 42-unit loft apartment building by this fall. Now it is scheduled for occupancy by fall 2005. A large source of the delay, Harvey said, was the result of negotiations with the National Park Service.

Because the building is receiving about \$2 million in historic preservation tax credits, its common spaces must be restored to their original condition. That requirement does not apply to the individual lofts, but does apply to the spacious old City Council chambers, which Harvey plans to convert into commercial space.

The project's cost also has increased, from an initial estimate of about \$5.5 million two years ago to \$7 million today. Harvey said the cost went up after architects developed more specific plans. The four-story building at Sixth Street and Ann Avenue served as City Hall from 1911 to 1972 and remained under municipal ownership until City Vision purchased the building from Wyandotte County's Unified Government earlier this year for \$10.

The renovations will convert office and meeting spaces into units that range from 600 to 1,500 square feet and will lease for \$450 to \$1,000 a month. The building will feature an artist's studio in the old men's jail and two penthouse units in what used to be the women's jail. The old police garage next door will provide covered parking.

Many of the apartments will preserve elements that give the building character, such as ceilings as high as 18 feet in places and old, walk-in safes in 15 of the units.

Bank of America is financing the project.

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