

BIRMINGHAM

Downtown hotel to be Marriott Renaissance

By JOSEPH D. BRYANT and DAWN KENT
News staff writers

Developers on Monday revealed Marriott Renaissance as the brand of a new \$52 million luxury hotel planned for downtown Birmingham, calling it a significant step in their vision for the project.

Also on Monday, members of the Birmingham City Council's finance and economic development committees approved a request for more than \$3.1 million in incentives for the project. A final vote by the full council is expected next Tuesday.

Birmingham's Harbert Realty Services is teaming with Concord Hospitality Enterprises Co. of Raleigh, N.C., to convert Regions Plaza at Fifth Avenue North and 20th Street into a 255-room hotel.

The 17-story building is the former headquarters of Regions Financial Corp., which has since moved its cor-

porate office across the street to the 30-story Regions Center following the \$10 billion merger with AmSouth Bancorp.

Plans for the hotel include a four-star rating, as well as conference and banquet facilities, a full-service restaurant and bar, fitness center, pool, concierge services and business center.

"The quality and level of services and ambiance that Marriott insists on will be downtown," said Harbert Realty Services CEO Harry M. Lynch.

Seven of the nine council members attended Monday's joint session of the finance and economic development committees at the Summit Club where developers detailed their plans.

Both committees approved the request for incentives that includes \$2.7 million in tax rebates and \$450,000 in infrastructure work.

As part of the incentive package, the city also will supplement the costs of

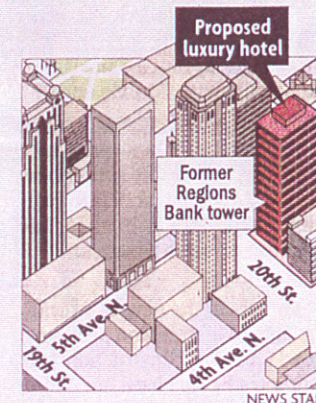
up to 255 parking spaces in the hotel's adjoining parking deck on Fourth Avenue North between 20th Street and Richard Arrington Jr. Boulevard.

Council members asked questions about businesses the hotel would bring. Lynch said a steak house and coffee house chain would be among tenants.

The project is expected to create 135 permanent jobs downtown and 300 construction jobs. The hotel will have an annual payroll of \$2.8 million.

Councilwoman Miriam Wither- spoon, who uses a wheelchair, agreed to support the incentives after she got assurances the facility's design would be mindful of the physically disabled. Lynch promised to consult her on how the hotel could serve the physically challenged.

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MARRIOTT RENAISSANCE

There are 137 Renaissance Hotels, Resorts and Suites, including 68 in the U.S. Marriott calls it a "quality-tier full-service brand providing guests with the ambiance of a boutique." Features include:

- ▶ Luxurious bedding, including a designer duvet and "clouds of pillows"
- ▶ Business center and high-speed Internet
- ▶ "Imaginative" restaurant menus
- ▶ Swimming pool
- ▶ Fitness center
- ▶ Conference and banquet facilities

MARRIOTT: New life for former Regions Plaza

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"I get discouraged and quite upset whenever I go to hotels and find rooms not to be accessible," she said. "I'm happy and I hope they keep their promise."

Developers also pledged an aggressive minority participation program that includes job outreach and training for employees and suppliers.

"Harbert is demonstrating a lot of corporate responsibility in making their approach to minority inclusion comprehensive and going beyond the standard promise of a good faith effort to also work on a lasting impact through mentoring and a com-

mitment to recruitment and training," said Carol Clarke, the city's director of economic development. "That's crucially important to helping Birmingham address some of its biggest issues."

Lynch praised the city and Mayor Bernard Kincaid for taking rapid action to secure the assistance his company needed.

"In terms of a project of this magnitude, the stars lined up for

us and we were able to clear up a lot of issues rather quickly," Kincaid said after the meeting.

Developers plan to close on their purchase of Regions Plaza next month.

Some Regions employees will remain at the former headquarters until June 2008. Construction of the hotel will begin after the final workers move out.

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