Halim has plans for downtown growth

by Bill Smith
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A long-time investor in Evanston says downtown needs to expand and add more residents to replace office workers now working from home.

And Cameel Halim is positioned to do something about it.

Halim, who is in the midst of opening his The GEM Museum Suites apartment hotel in the former King Home at 1555 Oak Ave., owns several additional properties near the hotel with development potential.
In an interview with Evanston Now, Halim says he wants to build three or four new residential properties on the sites he owns along Grove Street and Maple Avenue.

He recently sought a delay in a city requirement imposed as part of the hotel project approval that he pave the gravel parking lot east of the hotel at the corner of Grove and Maple that’s now used as parking for the McGaw YMCA.
And he says that within about 90 days he plans to submit plans to the city for a new residential development on the parking lot site — that will preserve the parking. That will be followed by plans for another residential development on what’s now a grassy lot just to the north at 1566 Maple Ave.
Halim says demand for space in the office and retail buildings he owns at 960-990 Grove St. is very low and that he has “no hope” of filling it.

In 2019 he won city approval to convert ground floor office space in the 960 building to retail use — just in time to have the pandemic crush demand for storefronts.

So he says he now plans to convert the whole property to residential use.
And says he anticipates that eventually he’ll tear down the vacant Botti Studio building at 1551 Maple, replacing it with an apartment development.
These plans won’t necessarily all be realized quickly.

Halim spent 11 years developing his Halim Time and Glass Museum at 1560 Oak Ave. — a process greatly extended after the Victorian building on the site burned to the ground as it was undergoing renovation.

And it took six years from his purchase of the King Home, and an aborted conversion of the property to an assisted living facility, before its opening this summer as the apartment hotel.

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