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Groundbreaking for Washington Heights' First Hotel



By [Nigel Chiwaya](#) on July 30, 2013 1:02pm

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WaHi Hotel Groundbreaking

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS — Officials broke ground Tuesday on Washington Heights' first hotel, the latest example of the fast-moving development of West 168th Street.

Several elected officials and community members gathered Tuesday morning to start construction on the \$22 million hotel, which will be located at 514 West 168th street between Audubon and Amsterdam avenues.

Developers Oskar Brecher and Ari Sherizan turned to Washington Heights after failing to secure property near Columbia University's Morningside Heights campus, Brecher said.

The pair is building the hotel on top of a former parking lot that they purchased last year. Brecher said the hotel was already zoned for commercial use when they purchased it.

"I don't even think that the owners who sold it to us had any deep appreciation of the fact that this was such a unique space," Brecher said. "It was like walking around with a divining rod and it came up heads at this property."

Brecher and Sherizan said they received significant support from community groups and elected officials in the area.

"We've had a tremendous amount of support," Brecher said, pointing to help from the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone (UMEZ), City Councilman Ydanis Rodriguez and Assemblywoman Gabriela Rosa as being instrumental in pulling together financing for the project. "Everybody really joined in."

Community officials expressed optimism in the project Tuesday. Rodriguez hailed the hotel as another sign of progress being made in the area.

"This is like a new day for Northern Manhattan," Rodriguez said.

"This is a market that exists and is waiting for this hotel to be completed," added UMEZ president Ken Knuckles, who pointed to nearby New York Presbyterian Hospital as a driver of traffic to the hotel.

Construction of the project is expected to last 16 months. When it is completed, the 40,000 square-foot hotel will feature 11 floors and 54 rooms. Brecher added that 15,000 square feet in the space will be dedicated to medical offices.

No name has been chosen for the hotel, which Brecher says it will operate around the level of a three-star hotel, comparable to a Courtyard by Marriott.

“It will be fairly basic with nice-sized rooms, but not a huge amount of amenities other than a meeting room.” Brecher said, adding: “You check in, you have a nice room and you check out.”