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Civil Rights Museum renovation to include expansion into unused Lorraine Motel space

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The long-awaited renovation of the [National Civil Rights Museum](#) will begin this spring with a \$1 million first phase that will expand the museum's introductory gallery and add more than 3,500 square feet of space at the Lorraine Motel site that is currently unused.

During the initial phase, the museum's office and administrative staff will move into a building purchased last year by the **J.R. Hyde III** Family Foundation at 409 S. Second St. that is currently being renovated. According to a deed filed with the Shelby County Register of Deeds, the property was purchased for \$590,000.

The entire renovation project will be budgeted at \$26 million, \$17.5 million of which has been raised through a capital campaign, says **Beverly Robertson**, president of the Civil Rights Museum. Self Tucker Architects is designing the renovation and collaborating with Washington, D.C.-based Howard + Revis Design Services on the exhibit upgrades.

Robertson says the upgrades will make the exhibits more interactive to accommodate the way younger visitors process information.

"People don't want to come to a museum and read a book on a wall," Robertson says. "We're going to have several experiences to encourage discussion with smart tables and other features."

The renovation will take advantage of 3,530 square feet of unused space on the second floor of the Lorraine, which is currently being used for storage, says **Tracy Lauritzen Wright**, director of administration and special projects for the museum.

When the museum was built in 1991, the Lorraine was gutted down to the original walls and the space on the second floor outside of the original room where **Martin Luther King** Jr. was assassinated wasn't built out. The entire museum is 59,295 square feet.

The new design calls for the incorporation of that space for more exhibits, including an area for visitors to "decompress" after the entire museum experience, says **Juan Self**, a principal with Self Tucker.

"Some of the exhibits are intense and many people have said after going through them, they needed some time for reflection," Self says.

The design moves the gift shop to the second floor and adds a new restaurant. A grand staircase will be created and a tie-in to the

Legacy Building across the courtyard. Interactive listening posts will be installed in the courtyard to allow visitors to get a preview of inside exhibits. While the entryway project could be completed by late this summer, the second floor construction is scheduled to begin in the fall and could be completed by late 2012.

Robertson says the ultimate footprint of the new Civil Rights Museum could encompass three buildings, including the fire station adjacent to the current building. The fire station was used by the FBI for surveillance on **Martin Luther King Jr.**, so it has its own history. Robertson says the goal of the renovations is to make sure visitors receive the optimum experience of the museum's message.

"We've got to put the meat on the bone and challenge people to think about where they are and what they'll do as they advance into the future," she says. "People really want to come here now, but we don't have as much space as we need to satisfy that need."

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