

Old Howard Johnson restaurant being gutted, converted to real estate office

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Motorists at State Road A1A and Lake Avenue can probably still recognize the shape of the old Howard Johnson restaurant at that intersection.

But the days of peppermint ice cream and an informal lunch with friends along the diner's counter are long gone at the South End site.

The building is gutted, signaling its change to a real estate office in the space that has been shuttered for years.

With a main building permit for \$275,000 of interior renovation, work at the site is becoming more noticeable now that most of the building has been torn out while the outer shell remains.

West Palm Beach architect Rene Tercillia said the building, because of its age, is presenting some structural issues that are being handled. He estimated the renovated property will be "up and running" in four to six months.

A renovation wasn't what property owner Richard Sloane had in mind when he hired Palm Beach architect Eugene Lawrence to represent him before the town's Architectural Commission.

In September 2010, ARCOM members signed off on a demolition request for the one-story property at 2880 S. Ocean Blvd. But they rejected Sloane's ideas and Lawrence's renderings twice, prompting Sloane to bury plans for a new building at the site and stick with what was there.

The first rejected design was for a limestone building with a flat roof combined with a pitched, barrel-tile roof feature.

The second plan rejected, in October 2010, included a second, barrel-tile roof deck on a modern building.

In December, Lawrence withdrew it from the ARCOM agenda.

Sloane, through HOJO Partners LLC, bought the property, formerly owned by the 2880 Development Group LLC, for \$1.5 million in December.

Les Evans and the Chapman Trust were members of the 2880 Development Group.

Sloane plans to open Ocean Via Realty LLC at the site.

The original building permit was issued in 1954 for the construction of a \$65,000 Howard Johnson's restaurant at the northwest corner of State Road A1A and Lake Avenue.

Miami architect Rufus Nims, listed on the permit, was credited with the template for the Howard Johnson Motor Lodge, used in many of its locations, according to the Triangle Modernist Houses website provided by Palm Beach planning administrator John Lindgren.

The building became Murray's Palm Beach diner in 1991 with a name change to South Ocean Grill in 2000, Lindgren said. It has stood vacant since 2001, he said.

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