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Cooper Lamp factory turns 'green'

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Originally slated to go condo, the old Cooper Lamp factory at 2545 W. Diversey in Logan Square will instead house the city's first "Green Exchange," 1st Ward Ald. Manny Flores announced earlier this month.

The newest proposal for the building would transform the four-story, 250,000 square foot factory-once proposed as a new condominium development-into a home for retailers selling "sustainable products or services," according to Flores's office. The developers, Baum Development, apparently already have letters of intent from several tenants, and hope to include an organic restaurant, a sustainable furniture store, a car sharing service and a bike shop, among other ideas.

Other wrinkles include a promise to attain LEED environmental certification, priority parking for hybrids and the requisite green roof.

"The rise in global competition requires America's economy to become more innovative and forward looking." Flores said in a press release this week. "Green Exchange provides 21st century jobs based on new technologies and services that are environmentally sustainable. This development paves the way for Chicago to become the green economy's Silicon Valley."

The "Green Exchange" is an intriguing idea, and a good way to reuse an old warehouse building that doesn't include high-priced lofts. If successful, this would potentially serve as a destination retail for green-minded consumers, who could easily get over there from the nearby Kennedy Expressway in-gasp-their cars.

It's also a good time for this sort of project; while Logan Square and neighboring West Lakeview are getting oversaturated with new condos, both neighborhoods could definitely use the retail boost from this development.

The only thing I worry about is whether limiting the businesses to "green" uses will run into trouble if some of the businesses don't make it. I guess that's a question that could be better explored after the site gets up and running, but it's a concern nonetheless. The more positive spin would be to see this as a business incubator for new, environmentally sensitive businesses, which could conceivably have positive ripple effects throughout the city.

It's also somewhat unfortunate that a green-centered development like this one is fairly far from public transportation, but that's more an accident of geography than a criticism of the developers or Flores.

Still, if the developers properly market the "Green Exchange" and are able to attract shoppers from the nearby Best Buy and Target big box outlets, the project could be a huge success for all involved.

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