

CRAIN'S GRAND RAPIDS BUSINESS

Grand Rapids apartment, restaurant project lands \$874K in state backing

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First-time developer Juan Lopez plans a new Cuban restaurant named Palmas, along with 17 apartments, at 1516 Cesar E. Chavez Ave. SW in Grand Rapids. Credit: Maxam Architecture

A first-time developer's mixed-use housing and restaurant project in the fast-growing Roosevelt Park neighborhood of Grand Rapids has landed nearly \$900,000 in state backing.

Developer Juan Lopez was awarded an \$874,000 Revitalization and Placemaking program grant in support of his plans to convert a dilapidated building at 1516

Cesar E. Chavez Ave. SW into 17 apartments with a Cuban restaurant called Palmas on the ground floor, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced Wednesday.

The RAP program provides access to gap financing for place-based infrastructure and real estate rehabilitation and development.

Whitmer said the project aligns with her administration's goal to end Michigan's 140,000-unit housing shortage.

"We need to 'build, baby, build' so every Michigander has a safe, affordable place to call home," Whitmer said in a statement. "The Revitalization and Placemaking Program helps turn old, abandoned buildings into new, vibrant places that attract and retain talent, add new housing options, and create space for new business."

Lopez is developing the \$3.9 million Roosevelt Park project in partnership with Grand Rapids-based Cella Building Company.

In addition to receiving mentoring from Cella Building, the first-time developer attended Grand Rapids' Developer Day seminar and the MEDC's Emerging Developer Roadshow for training.

"I want to thank the MEDC for all their help and efforts in making our development possible," Lopez said in a statement. "This project will leave a long-lasting impact on the area and help create future jobs and housing that will strengthen our community."



Lopez plans to add two stories to the existing building. Credit: Google Street View

Grand Rapids-based Maxam Architecture is designing the project, which calls for turning the one-story, 4,400-square-foot building into three stories.

The basement of the building will have two apartment units and restaurant storage space.

The first floor would include the 1,652-square-foot restaurant and two one-bedroom, accessible apartment units, as well as a common area, bike storage, mailroom and the restaurant.

Two stories of new construction call for six apartment units each. In total, site plans call for four studio apartments, 12 one-bedroom units and one two-bedroom unit.

The building will have all-electric utilities and comply with GR2030 District energy efficiency standards, Peter Skornia, Cella Building president, previously told Crain's Grand Rapids Business.

Grand Rapids Economic Development Director Sarah Rainero said the project is in keeping with the city's goal to increase opportunities for emerging developers.

"We are committed to providing equal access to all of our tools and resources and want to see the momentum of activating property in neighborhood corridors continue," she said. "By partnering with the state on this project, the city is furthering our goal to be a more equitable and welcoming place to live, work and play."

State Sen. Winnie Brinks, D-Grand Rapids, noted Lopez's project adds to a wave of growth during the past few years in the Cesar E. Chavez corridor of Grand Rapids, which wrapped a [\\$7.5 million road construction project](#) in October and also is seeing additional investment from groups like Habitat for Humanity and other neighborhood entrepreneurs.

"Now, with this \$870,000 grant to create new residential units, we're building on that progress," Brinks said. "This is exactly what the RAP program — and the Democrats' increased funding for it — were meant to do: support projects that strengthen neighborhoods and create more opportunities for the people who live there."