

Group Aims to Rebuild Lake Street's Coliseum Building After Uprising Fire

The historic structure is set to provide a new home for Du Nord Craft Spirits and other Black-owned businesses

By **Cynthia Maya** - June 1, 2021



Coliseum Building and Freeman's Department Store in 1962
Hennepin County Library

A year after devastating destruction, something new is poised to rise up on Lake Street in south Minneapolis.

The Coliseum building on East Lake Street has long been a beacon for local businesses and BIPOC entrepreneurs, and the hope is to revive the space with new Black-owned businesses. Last summer, during the uprising following the murder of George Floyd, the historic building that was [home to a department store](#) for more than 50 years was badly burned. (It is just a block from the Minneapolis Police Department's Third Precinct.)

Now, a group of buyers including [Redesign](#), a local non-profit community development corporation, is "working *with* and *for*" the community to rebuild the Coliseum. The firm says the buyers [secured purchase of the building for \\$2 million](#).

"Last summer merely highlighted the institutional racism, the structural racism that has existed since the beginning of America's time," Redesign

project manager Taylor Smrikárova says. In restoring, the goal is to not rebuild any part of Lake Street in that image. Redesign stepped in to prevent the former property owners from demolishing the building. “It would be retraumatizing to see more destruction happen very close to the epicenter of where destruction happened last summer,” Smrikárova says.

Smrikárova acknowledges how important it is to provide the 80,000 square feet of commercial space to locals. Redesign is [working with three Black-owned businesses](#) to co-own and operate the building. The group includes Chris Montana of [Du Nord Craft Spirits](#) (the first Black-owned distillery in the U.S.), Alicia Belton of [Urban Design Perspectives](#), and Janice Downing of [CommonSense Consulting@Work](#).

According to Smrikárova, the plan is to open a cocktail room and event space for Du Nord. Downing and Benton would create a “cooperative-owned office space” where they would be able to invite other Black creators to own and utilize their own office space. This is all part of Redesign’s initiative for ownership and wealth-building among a demographic that has often been left out of that conversation. “It is an example that equitable development is possible,” Smrikárova says.



A look at the Coliseum Building after the uprising of 2020

Provided

Redesign just finished its due diligence period, the closure happened to fall on May 25, the anniversary of George Floyd’s murder. They hope to raise the \$16 million they need to own the building by July and start

reconstruction sometime within this year. The project is largely publicly financed from a variety of funds including [We Love Lake Street](#) grants, [LISC](#), and [PACE Equity](#), among others. Due to the historical importance of the building—from its legacy as a commercial destination for the Minneapolis community to the events of last summer—Redesign is working to list the building in the National Register of Historic Places.

Instead of having commercial signs that promote the building’s re-opening, there is an alternate plan for signage during construction. “We instead want those to be messages of hope: ‘You have not been abandoned,’ or ‘Please come and be a part of this revitalization and rehab effort,’” Smrikárova says.

Redesign is working closely with [fiveXfive Public Art Consultants](#) to bring beautiful pieces from local BIPOC artists into the building and its exterior. The building will be a tangible invitation for the community to heal together and rebuild different kinds of structures after the trauma it has endured. Robyne Robinson, Principal of fiveXfive consulting and the Public Art Coordinator of the project says, “More than businesses, Seward-Longfellow has always been about the people who live there.”

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