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## Cosmopolitan on the Canal cleanup continues 2 months after arson

### As cleanup continues, few signs remain of fire that ravaged Canal complex; bulk of rebuilding to come

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Mounds of charred rubbish have been cleared. Windows smashed by firefighters extinguishing massive blazes have been replaced. Apartment roofs left gaping open by flames have been enclosed.

Two months after an arson ravaged the Cosmopolitan on the Canal, the only obvious fire damage are a few patches of black residue on a stretch of wood hallway visible from the west side of the property. Since the site was turned back over to development company Flaherty & Collins Properties about a week after the March 12 blaze, crews have been working to clean up the site and preserve what's left of the \$37 million luxury housing and retail complex.

The structure is solid enough to walk around inside, but the preservation process continues, with the bulk of the rebuilding yet to begin, said Mark Conover, a spokesman for the company.

Developers are aiming to complete the downtown property at Michigan Street and Senate Avenue by 2010, though no date has been set.

"We're still in the cleanup and securing-the-assets stage of the process," Conover said. "We can't set a construction timeline until we have started (more of) the reconstruction process."

Before the fire, developers had hoped to open the project this week. More than half of the 218 apartment units were complete.

The arson investigation is ongoing.

Brandon L. Burns, 23, has been charged in the incident and faces his next court appearance May 26. It's not clear whether Burns, a homeless man who told authorities he set the fire to intimidate his ex-girlfriend, acted alone, said Mario Massillamany, a spokesman for the Marion County prosecutor's office. No suspects have been ruled out.

As prosecutors continue to examine the case, crews are making progress on the six-story, 340,000-square-foot project.

On the Senate Avenue side of the development, the 17,000-square-foot retail area is near completion.

The only damage to that area was from the water that ran through the bottom floor of the building as firefighters worked to put out the blaze, a problem that was remedied by blowing dryers through the area for five weeks.

Above that retail section, in the upper four stories of the development, stand 76 wood-framed apartment units. Nineteen of those units have been reframed since the fire. The others, which were

near completion before the blaze, have been gutted down to the frame because of water damage.

In some units, remnants of pre-fire progress, such as floor tiles and a bathtub, remain.

Much of the complex's concrete foundation, including a 2-foot-thick slab separating the retail and residential floors, survived the flames and has passed tests to ensure stability. The structure's 345-space parking garage also was unscathed.

"The fact that this building survived such a devastating blaze is a testament to the construction," Conover said.

Parts of the structure, though, were decimated.

Three buildings on the west side of the project bordering the canal, which included apartments, town homes, a fitness center and retail space, have been wiped out. All that remains of them now are clean concrete foundations. Developers are unsure when they will start to rebuild those areas.

Flaherty & Collins has spent nearly \$3 million on cleanup and preservation, which are covered by insurance.

Conover did not know whether insurance would cover the entire cost of rebuilding.

Now that they're working on the project again, Flaherty & Collins officials have stepped up security measures.

Lights that will be used on the top floor of the parking garage have been turned on to illuminate the alley adjacent to the development. An 8-foot, chain-link fence has been put up around the perimeter, and a security guard monitors the project when construction crews aren't present.

"We don't want another arson," Conover said. "Security is important to us already, but we're more sensitive to that now that we've been a victim."

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