

# The Virginian-Pilot

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## A year after The Main opens, neighboring Marriott gets a major \$25 million renovation

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Courtesy of Commonwealth Partners

The Norfolk Waterside Marriott, at 235 E. Main St., will renovate its 405 guest rooms with a modern redesign starting this year.

### NORFOLK

Developers renovating the Norfolk Waterside Marriott hotel are considering a bold move: ripping out the swimming pool.

The sixth floor, which includes the pool along with a fitness center and terrace, may see some of the most significant changes soon, as the downtown building

undergoes a \$25 million overhaul.

Hotel representatives favor instead adding an enclosed entertaining area near the terrace to take advantage of the view overlooking Waterside District and the river. Bottom line: They're hoping more picturesque event space amounts to more weddings and corporate VIP parties.

"How many of you really go to a hotel and swim in the pool? Not that many," said Cathy Drewry, who handles sales and marketing for the hotel. "Believe me, we will work with our partners in downtown and have a pool for you to go to. But, otherwise, honestly, if you're in the hotel business, you don't want a pool."

The change is one of many coming to the Marriott, at 235 E. Main St., whose one-year-old Hilton neighbor, The Main hotel-conference center, seems to have raised the bar for every competing hotel in the vicinity. [Many are investing in renovations and updating their amenities.](#)

Though it's too early to know its full impact, revenue per available room went from \$54.87 in 2016 to \$59.85 last year in the Norfolk and Portsmouth area, according to STR Global, a Tennessee-based company that tracks data on the industry. That increase occurred even as the room supply grew nearly 5 percent in the submarket.

The task for Marriott is clear: Bring a hotel from the 1990s into the modern age. The project has already begun. In January, its restaurant, Shula's Grill 347, got a makeover that included white granite accents and hardwood floor. The Dining Room on the second floor has new furnishings, and the art arrives at the end of March.

About four months ago, the [Richmond-based Lingerfelt Commonwealth Partners bought the property from Procaccianti Group](#) for \$35 million, with an extra \$1.5 million going to the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority for the land. The city agreed to subsidize renovations, putting at least \$4 million – an amount that includes the proceeds from the land – toward the hotel's conference center. Like the center in The Main, Norfolk owns the Marriott's meeting space.

Through the housing authority, the city also will give Lingerfelt Commonwealth up to \$3 million in grant money over the next decade, based on tax receipts, according to the October deal.

Simultaneously, other projects with public investment are in the pipeline. Two blocks north of The Main, another development team is converting the historic Royster Building on Granby Street into a [glass-art-themed boutique hotel with 120 rooms](#). The city is refunding up to \$5 million from taxes generated to the builders. But officials say the city will profit by at least \$8.3 million in new tax

revenue from the hotel over 15 years.

In his State of the City address about a week ago, [Mayor Kenny Alexander announced the prospect of more construction at MacArthur Center](#) that could include yet another full-service hotel. The mall's owners, Starwood Retail Partners, have proposed putting the development on the ice rink's lot at the corner of Monticello Avenue and Freemason Street. The city's role in that deal is unclear.

Duane Gauthier, managing director of hospitality for Marriott's developer, said the speech was the first time he had heard about the mall proposal and hopes to learn more specifics.

"We need to better understand the new supply in the market," he said. Despite what appears to be lots of new competition, the Marriott team is confident its renovations will position the hotel at the top of the pack in South Hampton Roads.

"I will say this: [The Cavalier is The Cavalier](#), and it's a little hard to beat," Drewry said during a recent presentation for the Downtown Norfolk Council, a business organization. "But, in terms of business hotels and conventions, we're going to be the place."

Starting in October and going through next July, construction crews will gut the 405-room hotel. Temporarily taking 88 rooms out of circulation to renovate four floors at a time, the hotel won't close during the project.

The plan involves complete guest room redos, with open closets, low-platform beds and sliding doors on the bathrooms. About 75 percent of the bathrooms will lose their tubs and instead feature new walk-in showers.

The project will increase the hotel by one room, a second presidential suite, on the concierge level, Drewry said. By next March, they'll open the M Club, Marriott's private lounge for elite members.

Marriott also wants to revisit the restaurant design, perhaps by adding garage doors, similar to those at The Main, for an open-air experience.

But the remodeling of the city-owned conference center won't come until winter 2020. At that time, crews will begin renovating the meeting space with modern touches, such as glass breakout meeting rooms, linenless tables and solar shades.

"I can tell you, NATO, which is one of our biggest clients, is just dying for this

look,” Drewry said as she showed a drawing of the ballroom.

Marriott management said The Main hasn’t prevented the hotel from booking big meetings. In fact, Drewry said, the hotel has been working with it and Sheraton Norfolk Waterside Hotel to capture groups that require multiple venues and rooms.

The calendar, especially following the guest room renovations, is already filling up, she said.

“April in 2019, I don’t even have any dates left in that month,” Drewry said. “That’s how well our partners – the Sheraton and the Hilton – we’re all working together to bring new and better things in.”