

Morton Salt plant getting massive riverside redo

By Ryan Ori | November 07, 2016



One of the most recognizable buildings along the Kennedy Expressway is set to be transformed into a major riverfront mixed-use complex, but its most eye-catching feature will remain.

Adding another project to the fast-changing corridor along the North Branch of the Chicago River, a venture of developer R2 has purchased the 89-year-old Morton Salt warehouse at 1329 N. Elston Ave. and plans to turn it into an office, retail and entertainment venue—while retaining its distinctive branded rooftop, the company said in a statement.

Dubbing the development the Salt District, a nod to the site's history, the \$20 million overhaul includes renovating and reusing most of the existing buildings on the property for events and concerts, retail tenants and 30,000 square feet of office space anchored by Morton Salt itself, which will relocate its research and development office there from suburban Elgin, beginning in 2020.

Working in conjunction with Morton Salt, which shut down its operations at the site in 2015, "we have found an innovative way to give the property new life," said R2 Managing Principal Matt

Garrison, whose firm bought the property from the salt company last month for \$15 million, according to a source familiar with the deal. R2 is partnering on the redevelopment with Skydeck, an investment venture backed by Chicago energy magnate Michael Polsky. "I think it's going to be pretty unique in the market in terms of what it is going to bring," Garrison said.

In addition to offices, tentative plans for the site's 125,000 square feet of buildings include 50,000 square feet of retail and an outdoor venue designed to host markets and festivals year-round. Those would overlook a nearly 2-acre park along a 500-foot riverfront stretch next to the warehouse, which Garrison said could eventually become a stop for water taxis, river boat tours and kayaks just west of Goose Island.

The vision for the 4.25-acre site adds to a list of ambitious projects R2 is pursuing along the river, where many developers have been snapping up property in anticipation of the gift they finally got last year: a scale-back of land-use rules along the North Branch Industrial Corridor that restricted residential, office and other commercial uses.