

Historic Chinese eatery to become a Walgreens



Michael Neibauer, The Examiner
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WASHINGTON -

A historic, family-owned Chinese restaurant in Cleveland Park is slated to become the District's first Walgreens pharmacy.

(Andrew Harnik/Examiner)
Yenching Palace, in the heart of the Cleveland Park Historic District, has been purchased by the nation's most profitable pharmacy chain, Walgreens, which is planning to open its first store in the District.

Yenching Palace, at 3524 Connecticut Ave. NW in the heart of the Cleveland Park Historic District, will be transformed into one of 500 new Walgreens opening this year nationwide. Plans to alter the building's façade are scheduled to be considered today by the Historic Preservation Review Board.

"We just signed a lease," said Carol Hively, Walgreens' spokeswoman. "It's definite now we're opening a store there."

The restaurant is a community institution, not only for its food but for its role in American history.

Owned and operated by the Lung family since 1955, Yenching Palace was the site of multiple meetings between intermediaries for President John F. Kennedy and Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. And according to the restaurant's Web site, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and high-ranking members of the Chinese delegation met there in 1971 in efforts to normalize relations between the two countries.

Hively said there will be a plaque "acknowledging the historic meeting that occurred at that location."

The Walgreens façade proposal won unanimous approval Monday from the local advisory neighborhood commission, on the condition that lighting and signage not interfere with adjacent apartments. The 8,550-square-foot store will not have a drive-through.

George Idelson, president of the Cleveland Park Citizens Association and a local resident since 1967, said he was impressed with Walgreens' plans for an art deco-like facade, which he said "fits in well" with the community. As for Yenching Palace, Idelson said, its time has passed.

"I remember when it was the preeminent Chinese restaurant in Washington," he said. "But the quality of the restaurant has deteriorated quite significantly. It's a friendly, familiar place to sit and eat and maybe have a get-together, but we won't miss it for the food."

The owner of Yenching Palace said Wednesday he's not sure when the restaurant will close. Hively also could not provide a timeline.

As of Nov. 30, Walgreens was ranked the nation's highest earning pharmacy with \$49.2 billion in annual sales, \$7 billion more than CVS. CVS operates 6,197 pharmacies to Walgreens' 5,580, though Walgreens plans to expand to 7,000 stores by 2010.

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