The long-shuttered Capitol House Hotel on River Road may be reborn if tentative plans by a downtown real estate developer for a $15 million renovation come to fruition.

By RANDY McCLAIN
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The Capitol House, on which a $3.5 million purchase agreement is pending, has remained boarded up the last several years, collecting dirt, grime and pigeon droppings.

The property, built in 1927, is still a local landmark. Once named the Heidelberg, the hotel remains on the National Register of Historic Places.

The original 10-story, 150-room section of the hotel was built in 1927. A 200-room addition was built in 1957.

The property was last used as a hotel in the late 1980s and at one time had been a gathering place for legislators and other public officials, including Huey P. Long.

The Resolution Trust Corp., which existed to liquidate the assets of failed savings and loans, acquired the troubled property in the late 1980s from Florida-based CommNet Financial Services Inc. CommNet had taken title to the property through its own foreclosure proceedings on a Dallas-based real estate company.

The RTC sold the 1927 section of the Capitol House to Pentagon Petroleum Co. for $1 million in 1990.

Businessman Phillips C. "Phil" Witter got control of the 200-room 1957 addition, which stood on land he owned.

Three years later, in 1993, Lady Luck Gaming Corp. and Capitol House Preservation Co. bought out Pentagon Petroleum and Witter for a total of $2 million.

Lady Luck wanted to make the hotel part of a grand gambling complex at the foot of Florida Street, but that deal fell apart when the company failed to win a state gaming license.

Capitol House Preservation Co. said in 1994 that it too wanted to remodel the hotel, but its plans never materialized apparently due to a lack of outside financing.