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Wednesday, August 19, 2009, 2:21pm EDT | Modified: Wednesday, August 19, 2009, 3:39pm

Carla Hall eyes former Stevens School for new business

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Former "Top Chef" contestant and local caterer Carla Hall wants to bring a retail, dining and catering concept to the former Stevens School in D.C.

Hall has joined one of the three teams competing for the rights to redevelop the vacant space, which is in Foggy Bottom. Hall has paired with Chicago-based **Equity Residential**, which is working with **Neighborhood Development Co.** of D.C., **Hickok Cole Architects** and **Michael Marshall Architecture** on a proposal.



Carla Hall

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A winning proposal could be picked by the city as early as Friday. But the parties involved said a September decision is more likely.

Hall would take approximately 3,500 square feet of ground floor retail space in the multifamily housing development that the team is proposing, under the

plan. She will use the space to sell products bearing her name, hold events and have a small space for dining, including an outdoor patio.

"It's going to be a little bit of everything," said Greg White, vice president of development for Equity Residential. "It was the spark that we didn't have for the project."

Hall said the dining space would be used for exclusive events such as chef's table dinners and cooking classes, though the space is not designed as a cooking school.

"People constantly ask me about whether I am opening a restaurant and I say no," she said. "I think people don't really think outside the box. This is kind of everything under one roof."

Hall also said the space could be used for job training programs in the community.

Marshall, CEO of Michael Marshall Architecture, said the project is hoping to stay true to the school's original nature and include existing architectural details such as chalkboards. Hall would team with the nearby Roosevelt School to hire student interns at her facility, according to Marshall.

"We really want to use this school to create an identity for her and the things she's interested in," he said. The residential complex could include a rooftop garden for Hall's herb growing, he said.

Marshall only recently brought Hall into the project.

"I've known Carla for at least 10 years, and I always used to bug her about being the architect for her [eventual] restaurant," Marshall said. His firm has designed such restaurants as Tosca and Posto downtown.

The team's original proposal for the site, which was due Aug. 6 and presented to two

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community groups for feedback, did not include the Hall component, though White said he has talked informally with District officials about the addition.

Equity Residential is competing against two other teams to take over the Stevens School, both of which are pitching hotels for the site.

The team from Peebles Corp. of Coral Gables, Fla., is proposing a single luxury hotel run by **Morgans Hotel Group Co.**

D.C.-based Moddie Turay Co.'s team is proposing a hotel from **Kimpton Hotel & Restaurant Group LLC.**

The Stevens School is a 39,000-square-foot property built just east of Washington Circle on 21st Street NW. Hall's operation would be within the existing school building.

Hall runs Alchemy Caterers, a Wheaton-based catering company. She appeared on last season's run of Bravo's "Top Chef" series, where the fan favorite finished in the final three and became a local celebrity as a result.