The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Legislators Moving to Rossiya Site

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March 23, 2011



A structure known as the Old English Courtyard overlooking the dormant construction site where the hotel was. **Vladimir Filonov**

A parliamentary center will be built on the site near the Kremlin where the Rossiya Hotel once stood.

The idea for the center is not new, but local and federal officials were only able to bring it about after the dismissal of Mayor Yury Luzhkov.

A high-placed official in the Mayor's Office told Vedomosti that a parliamentary center would be built on the site and will house both the Federation Council and the State Duma. According to the source, negotiations are underway to transfer ownership of the site to the Office for Presidential Affairs, which handles construction.

Rights to the development of the site belong to the Rossiya Company. They will also be transferred to the state, a source close to that company said, adding that doing so was Mayor Sergei Sobyanin's idea. The Rossiya Company belongs to Gostinichnaya Kompaniya, which is

controlled by the Mayor's Office.

Office for Presidential Affairs adviser Viktor Khrekov said he is unaware of city administration desires to transfer the site to federal ownership.

The proposal to build a parliamentary center on the site of the Rossiya, on the embankment of the Moscow River close to the Kremlin and Red Square, was made long ago.

A federal official commented that treating the sites between the Rossiya and the Christ the Savior Cathedral as a single complex would be convenient for maintenance and security.

A Kremlin source said, however, that support for idea was never unanimous at the city or federal level. Luzhkov in particular was opposed.

Shalva Chigirinsky's ST Development won the competition for the razing of the Rossiya Hotel and redevelopment of the site. Chigirinsky had close ties to Luzhkov's wife. Chigirinsky was prepared to invest $800 million in construction on the site to create a 456,000-square-meter complex that would include a 2,000-room five-star hotel, a movie theater and parking facilities.

The results of that competition were disputed by unsuccessful bidder Monab and, after a series of court cases, the contract with ST Development was annulled. That occurred when the dismantling of the Rossiya was 90 percent complete, and Chigirinsky's relationship with Luzhkov's wife was ruined forever. The project and its site were returned to the city.

"It is the position of the president and the prime minister that this type of [parliamentary] center is necessary for us," head of the Office for Presidential Affairs Vladimir Kozhin said in an interview with Vedomosti. State Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov asked President Dmitry Medvedev at the beginning of the year to speed up the decision-making process for the center.

The center is to place both houses of parliament under one roof, along with all support services for them, which are now dispersed throughout the city. It would also include fitness and entertainment facilities.

The State Duma is now located on Okhotny Ryad and the Federation Council is divided between Bolshaya Dmitrovka Ulitsa and Novy Arbat.

According to Kozhin, the possibility of placing the parliamentary center in the Military Missile Forces Academy on Moskvoretskaya Naberezhnaya — not far from the site of the Rossiya — was considered. But Luzhkov's departure and the ban on new construction in downtown Moscow have revived the idea of using the site of the hotel.

The decision still rests with the Moscow city administration, a source in the Rossiya Company said. He warned, however, that it would be necessary to find $2 billion to $3 billion in budget money to finance the gigantic center, which would also have to include an auditorium to accommodate 5,000 people. Transportation in the area would be complicated as well, he added.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/03/23/legislators-moving-to-rossiya-site-a5819