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St. Louis Hotel Poised to Reopen as Shelter for Tornado-Displaced Families—Effort Blocked by Legal and Institutional Barriers

Lack of funding, corporate silence, and political interference threaten viable shelter plan amid a growing humanitarian crisis

St. Louis, MO — June 4, 2025 — The Last Hotel STL, a landmark property in the Washington Avenue Historic District, is fully prepared to reopen as a professionally operated family shelter for those displaced by the recent tornado disaster. Despite this readiness, efforts have been stalled by legal gridlock, lack of funding, and a disturbing lack of support from local institutions and corporations.

Majority owner Michael Qualizza has outlined a detailed, transparent plan to transform the hotel into a safe, fully staffed facility offering meals, rooms, security, daycare, and dignity to families in need.

“This isn’t about business—it’s about people,” said Qualizza. “We’re prepared to operate this property with dignity, structure, and safety. But internal interference and stalled commitments are putting lives at risk.”

The St. Louis Development Corporation (SLDC) has reviewed and affirmed the plan’s viability, recognizing the need for a professionally managed facility—not a volunteer-led stopgap. Utilities can be restored immediately. Security is on standby. Staff are willing to work around the clock—some even offering to sleep in closets and mechanical rooms to free space for families.

Corporate Silence and Legal Obstruction Compounding the Crisis

As the city struggles to find resources, the absence of support from major corporations and civic institutions has come under fire.

“This is an absolute humanitarian tragedy,” said Qualizza. “We are ready to open The Last Hotel STL for as long as it takes. But where is the support?”

Despite calls to action, **U.S. Bank**—which pledged \$100 million for unrest relief in Minnesota—has made no comparable commitment in St. Louis. Neither have other corporate giants with a strong local footprint, including:

- **St. Louis Cardinals**
- **St. Louis Blues**
- **US Bank CDC, Boeing, Amazon, Microsoft, Square, Apple**

Criticism has also mounted against **Dowd Bennett LLP**, the law firm praised for securing an \$800 million settlement over the Rams' departure—yet reportedly retained over \$270 million in legal fees, leaving less than \$300 million for the City.

“On principle, I can no longer work with a firm that enriched itself while the city struggles,” said Qualizza. “Their continued interference is unacceptable.”

Legal complaints have been filed with the Missouri Supreme Court and other regulatory bodies, seeking federal review of conflicts of interest and obstruction of urgent humanitarian work.

Window of Opportunity Closing Fast

Multiple buyers are currently touring The Last Hotel, raising concerns that a sale will eliminate the chance to use it as a family shelter—potentially displacing hundreds of families permanently.

“If this shelter doesn’t open, it won’t be because it wasn’t viable,” said Qualizza. “It will be because bureaucracy and personal agendas blocked the opportunity to do the right thing.”

The project’s operations include 24/7 security, double payroll to ensure full staffing, and commercial kitchen/event spaces ready to support relief organizations such as the American Red Cross.

About The Last Hotel STL

Located in the historic International Shoe Company Building, located at 1501 Washington Ave. The Last Hotel STL reopened in 2019 and served as a vital resource during the COVID-19 pandemic. It closed in April 2025 under the unilateral action of Co-Manager Neil Freeman, who has repeatedly opposed sale and shelter proposals despite mounting community need.

“We have the people. We have the building. We have the need,” said Qualizza. “What’s missing is the will to act.”