

Springfield Union Station demolition progresses; real estate consultant coming on board

Jim Kinney | jkinney@repub.com By Jim Kinney | jkinney@repub.com

Follow on Twitter

on January 16, 2015 at 2:47 PM, updated January 16, 2015 at 3:22 PM

SPRINGFIELD — Skid steer loaders driven by rubbish-removing construction workers whirled and twirled Friday morning through the grand concourse of Springfield's **Union Station**.

Turn by turn, they grabbed a pile of construction debris from what was once a lunch counter or a row of ticket booths and hauled it outside for recycling or disposal.

Upstairs on a second-floor mezzanine, city chief development officer Kevin Kennedy marveled at how opened up the 66,000-square-foot main waiting room looked and felt now that demolition had begun. And, from the mezzanine, it was all visible.

"Imagine what a magnificent space this will be," Kennedy said of the mezzanine. "With these great windows to the outside on one side and the view of the grand waiting room on the other."

He even joked that one spot would be a perfect place to put a band if someone was hosting a formal dance in the space.

Kennedy, Christopher Moskal, executive director of the Springfield Redevelopment Authority, and Leroy Clink, the clerk of the works on the project who is employed by Freeland Construction, led a brief tour of Union Station on Friday.

Demolition work has exposed the building's interior steel frame. Gone is the crumbling plaster, which will be replaced by new walls and restored marble architectural accents.

Construction continues at the Union Station project in Springfield.

An update on the construction progress at the Union Station project in Springfield.

The work is part of the \$82 million renovation and re-purposing of Springfield's Union Station into the Union Station Regional Intermodal Transportation Center.

The project, long championed by U.S. Rep. Richard E. Neal, D-Springfield, is designed to mesh with the planned expansion of passenger rail service through the region and enliven the northern blocks of Springfield's downtown.

It is set to be completed in the fall of 2016.

The new Union Station complex will have 377 parking spaces, 26 berths for intercity and local intracity buses and rail service. Much of the first-floor space will be taken up with ticketing, waiting and office space.

Rail passengers will access their trains through a now-closed tunnel under the tracks. Passengers will take staircases or elevators up from the tunnel to the tracks. The tunnel goes as far as Lyman Street, connecting Union Station with the rest of downtown.

By June, workers will dismantle a rabbit warren of small upper-floor offices for railroad employees, some with the desks still in place, Clink said. That space will be replaced with ready-to-rent office space with modern electricity, data connections, heating and ventilation.

In a few weeks, the city will start working with **The Massachusetts Realty Group**, a partnership of Greystone and JLL, to determine who the best tenants would be. The Massachusetts Realty Group is the real estate consultant to the MBTA.

"Now that we have the construction underway, we can start to talk about amenities," Kennedy said.

Ideas include a food court and some basic transit-related retail such as a newsstand. **SquareOne**, a Springfield agency that provides early education and child care services, is thinking of renting some of the space as a replacement for space it lost in the 2012 natural gas explosion.

Larger-scale retail is not likely to be successful, Kennedy said.

"I think the days of downtown retail are passed," he said. "That is why we keep talking about a food court, because a food court is going to make us money."

It's money the Springfield Redevelopment Authority will use to offset yet-to-be determined operations costs at the station.

The Boston & Albany Railroad built Springfield's Union Station in 1926, and closed much of it in the 1970s.