

East Side project taking shape

Buffalo Urban Development Corp. will soon own enough property to find new uses for 35.6 acres of land and 700,000 square feet of industrial buildings



This building at 683 Northland Avenue on Buffalo's East Side is part of the Buffalo Urban Development Corp.'s Northland Avenue Belt Line Corridor development project. John Hickey/Buffalo News

By Jonathan D. Epstein | News Business Reporter | @jdepstein | Google+

on January 30, 2015 - 7:24 PM, updated January 31, 2015 at 12:33 AM

By the end of next month, a city economic development agency will have full possession of all the initial targeted properties for a planned new light industrial economic development hub on the East Side aimed at manufacturing and energy companies.

The Buffalo Urban Development Corp. confirmed it has 11 properties under contract on Northland Avenue and Dutton Street, in what is termed the Northland Avenue Belt Line Corridor. The total purchase price for the properties is \$4.4 million, and the transaction is expected to close in February.

The properties include 631, 644, 664, 683, 688, 690, 741, 767 and 777 Northland, plus 126 and 128 Dutton. The agency already bought 537 E. Delavan Ave. for \$250,000. Five sellers were involved. In all, the transactions will give the agency control of 35.6 acres of vacant or under-used industrial land, plus 700,000 square feet of industrial buildings. Those properties can now be cleaned up and redeveloped into shovel-ready land or facilities for new tenants, in an area that has long been neglected.

The purchases follow the announcement in September of a new plan under Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's Buffalo Billion initiative to create the East Side hub in an effort to both meet the need for more industrial space in the city while also revitalizing a troubled area. The plan could incorporate both light manufacturers as well as a proposed Workforce Training Center.

The state allocated \$6.7 million through Empire State Development Corp. to the agency to buy and prepare a total of 50 acres of land, which is located in a zone bounded by East Delavan and Fillmore avenues and Grider and East Ferry streets. Northland Avenue and a CSX Corp. railroad line also cut through it. The area includes former industrial properties such as Houdaille Industries, Niagara Machine & Tool Works and Otis Elevator Co.

Now the agency is moving on to the next stage. The agency's board this week approved the hiring, for up to \$450,000, of a team of architectural, engineering and real estate consulting firms to develop a reuse strategy for the properties. The team is led by LiRo Engineers Inc., and also includes Foit-Albert Associates, CBRE, WWS Planning, Panamerican Consultants Inc., Phillips Lytle LLP and ANPRA-Architecture PLLC. Eleven other teams were considered. The board also approved a \$72,461 contract with Fisher Associates for a higher-level environmental site assessment of several buildings that are being acquired at 631, 683, 741 and 777 Northland. The agency had already hired GZA Environmental of NY Inc. to perform the same type of assessment on vacant land and parking lots, for \$19,500.

Separately, the city's Office of Strategic Planning will prepare a neighborhood revitalization plan for the larger area, to go along with the BUDC project.

The agency's new responsibility also comes as its stewardship of two longstanding projects comes to a close. The agency had owned 155 acres of South Buffalo brownfields land but sold it to a state entity connected with University at Buffalo to become the new high-tech manufacturing hub at RiverBend. That's where SolarCity will build the largest solar-panel manufacturing facility in North America. The second project is the Buffalo Lakeside Commerce Park, which is still under BUDC's responsibility and is filling up.