

East Side workforce training center clears City Hall hurdle

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Renovation plans for the Northland Corridor's workforce training center on the city's East Side received the development green light from the Buffalo Planning Board.

The agency on Monday approved plans to turn a vacant, century-old industrial building into the first development along the 35-acre Northland Corridor aimed at creating both public- and private-sector investment in a demographically-challenged neighborhood.



Rendering of the planned training center on Buffalo's East Side.

“This gets us moving forward,” said Peter Cammarata, Buffalo Urban Development Corp. president.

Bids for the design work will go out by late spring or early summer. A design firm will be selected by late summer.

Cammarata said he hopes the work can start by late this year and the center will be operating by 2017's third quarter.

BUDC, the city's development agency, has acquired multiple former, and sometimes forgotten, industrial and commercial properties with the intent of bringing them back to life.

Northland's centerpiece is a 100,000-square-foot Western New York Workforce Training Center. The \$44 million training center is part of the Buffalo Billion development initiative and targeted for a portion of the former Niagara Machine and Tool Works building, a circa-1911 structure, located at 683 Northland Avenue.

The center will occupy slightly less than half of the 235,000-square-foot building.

“This is the beginning of the transformation,” said Martha Lamparelli, a planning board member.

Targeting various advanced manufacturing sectors, representatives from Empire State Development are currently negotiating with Erie Community College, SUNY Buffalo State and Alfred State College to run the center's training programs. BUDC leaders also hope to have other “life services” offered for the training center's participants.

Adam Walters, a Phillips Lytle partner and BUDC's attorney on the Northland project, said most of the work will focus on "cleaning up the building" and renovating three parking lots along Northland Avenue that neighbor the training center.

Walters said any future buildings and developments will be subject to individual approvals from the planning board and other city agencies.

Among the 35 acres of Northland property, Cammarata said he hopes most of the buildings — many of which date back to the early 1900s — can be saved and renovated. Combined all the buildings total approximately 750,000-square-feet.

Some may have to be razed because of their condition.

Cammarata estimates those buildings that can be preserved may total 500,000-square-feet, but even the demolished buildings can make way for new, market-driven developments.