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Demolition starts at site of future Armory apartment towers in Midtown

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A developer has started demolition to make way for the apartment towers that would help anchor a future entertainment district, to include a concert venue, rooftop bar, tennis hall of fame and six other tenants soon to be announced in the historic Armory building in Midtown.

Green Street St. Louis plans two apartment towers, with a total combined project cost of \$160 million, next to the Armory at Grand Avenue near Interstate 64. Each of the seven-story towers will have 265 units, for more than 500 apartments by the Armory, which will be redeveloped for a cost between \$45 million and \$50 million, Green Street Principal Phil Hulse said. The original plan to convert the Armory to office space was scrapped in 2020 in favor of more entertainment-focused concepts.



GREEN STREET REAL ESTATE

This rendering shows the view from Grand Avenue looking at the apartment towers and plaza planned for this Midtown redevelopment.

With Grand Avenue elevated in front of the Armory site, Green Street plans to build the apartments on the “podium” of a multi-story parking garage to bring the buildings to street level, with a streetside plaza in front of the towers and the Armory.

Six more entertainment-centered venues for the Armory will be announced in the next month or two, including a lounge for nightlife, Green Street said. Inside the 81,000-square-foot Armory, construction is already underway on the Rec Hall entertainment venue with ping pong, bocce ball and retro video games, which should open later this year. Other openings will be staggered, with a goal of something new every month.

The developer has started remediation as part of demolition on a building it owns at 500 Prospect Ave., the site of the first apartment building, which would abut Grand Avenue and could see construction start in late summer or early fall.

500 Prospect is owned by Green Street but partially occupied by woodworking company St. Louis Woodworks, which in 2020 filed a lawsuit against Green Street and is still operating out of the building. St. Louis Woodworks claims that its lease allowed a seven-year renewal starting in 2020, and that it attempted to exercise that right, at \$2 per square foot, in February 2020.

Green Street, the suit says, countered at \$6 per square foot, and that was rejected by Woodworks. Woodworks says it provided “specific support” for the \$2 figure, and that Green Street didn’t respond, leading Woodworks to believe the rent would be \$2 per square foot for the renewed term.

Through its attorney, Green Street stated in October 2020 that “the renewal was not effective,” and Woodworks must vacate, according to the suit.

Green Street has countersued with a claim of unlawful detainer, seeking eviction.

Hulse and Green Street Principal Kevin Morrell told the *Business Journal* they expect a judge to rule in their favor in the next 30 to 60 days, after which the part of the building housing St. Louis Woodworks could come down. In the meantime, the city issued a partial demolition permit Jan. 31 so that Green Street could take

down the vacant south side of the building only, at a cost of \$83,500. A message left with St. Louis Woodworks Tuesday was not immediately returned, and an attorney with its law firm, Pleban & Associates, had no immediate comment.

While waiting for the judge's decision, Green Street is looking ahead.

The Green Street principals view their project as working in tandem with Steve Smith's \$300 million mixed-use redevelopment of City Foundry to attract visitors to Midtown.

The two projects are separated by Interstate 64, but Great Rivers Greenway's proposed Brickline Greenway envisions a possible pedestrian bridge to connect the two sides of the neighborhood.

Adding more than 500 residents to the Armory site will make the site a "place that looks and feels like it's vibrant and alive," which will bring back the excitement that once surrounded the concerts and sporting events held at the historic venue, Hulse said. The Armory was a tennis hub in the 1950s and 1960s, and Hall of Fame players like Arthur Ashe and Jimmy Connors got their start on the building's hard-surface courts.

Though both projects revolve around the renovation of historic buildings, the massive 1930s-era Armory building will have a different feel than City Foundry's revival of the former Federal Mogul foundry as a food hall, retail stores and grocery store, Morrell said.

City Foundry's second phase, currently under construction with an apartment complex and mass timber office building, only adds to the Armory's prospects as a revamped entertainment site, the Green Street developers said.

"I really don't look at it as a competition. It'll be better than just Foundry standing by themselves or Armory standing by themselves," Morrell said. "If you're going to go and have a fun night on a Saturday, you're going to have a lot of options. You go to the Armory for a little bit and you end up over at the Foundry, and vice versa. You're creating this ecosystem here that will be the hub for entertainment."

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