

COMMENTARY

EDITORIAL

CRANES & SCAFFOLDS

AUGUST '05 PROGRESS REPORT ON HARTFORD DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

ARE THE PROJECTS ...  STALLED  CREEPING  MOVING ALONG  OR ROCKETING AHEAD?

Trumbull Centre: Model apartments opened for showing May 1. By August, half of the 100 units leased. Project remains on schedule, with apartments due for completion Oct. 1. So far, more than 450 of the garage's 600 spaces are leased on a monthly basis. No additional retailers to report, but cleaners, tailor, shoe repair, wine and sandwich shops will open in October.

Bond Hotel: What's the holdup? City moving to rescind tax break for formerly grand old hotel that's s-l-o-w-l-y transforming into a Homewood Suites. Hotel was supposed to open by March 31, but is now looking to late October. A worker says finishing touches — floor tile, cabinets, carpets — are going in. But there's obviously no rush. An inexplicable slowpoke in an otherwise hot housing/hotel market.

Hartford 21: Hearts aflutter at sight of soaring 36-story apartment tower rising like a phoenix. Topping-off ceremony slated for October, with occupancy by April. Other elements of \$160 million complex, at site of former civic center, on schedule. Garage to open this month, with retail and offices to follow. Construction clutter clearing, sidewalks on Trumbull and Asylum usable by Labor Day.

Pearl Tower: Harlem developer has beat out bids from a half-dozen others to redo the city-owned building at 101 Pearl St. into super-fancy condos selling for \$600,000 each. One of the losers is complaining loudly. This is the best proof yet of the wisdom of the 1998 plan to save Hartford's downtown by building Adriaen's Landing.

One American Plaza: Developer David Nyberg has signed two more first-floor tenants: Quiznos sandwich shop and sushi restaurant Koji, which will feature outdoor dining on roof deck one story above street level. Nyberg is renovating interior before renting office space. Facade improvement also in works.

410 Asylum: Eight years of battling to rescue this historic landmark from the wrecking ball and restore it for residential use have paid off. Mayor Eddie Perez and Common Ground President Roseanne Haggerty finally have a deal in place to convert the building into 70 mixed-income rental apartments overlooking Bushnell Park. Haggerty also gets an alternative site on which to build supportive housing for homeless, working poor and mentally ill. Give the city a lot of credit on this one.

The Metropolitan: David Nyberg of New Haven is showing Hartford how to develop housing units quickly without public subsidy. Nyberg's College Street LLC is transforming the former Hartford Electric Light Co. building at Pearl and Ann into 50 condominiums selling for \$250,000 to \$400,000. Nyberg expects every unit will be sold when building is ready for occupancy by year's end. First floor to include office and restaurant space.

Wadsworth Atheneum: Wadsworth officials in process of selecting an architect for renovation of former Hartford Times building, the new addition to the Wadsworth campus. There are lights on the historic Times facade at night, and there'll soon be a huge banner in back, visible from the convention center. Architect should be announced in fall.

Hartford Public Library: Early last month, Chief Librarian Louise Blalock joined others in autographing a roof beam before it was lifted and placed, an event marking the beginning of the end of phase two — and the near-completion of \$42 million renovation and expansion project. Hartford's public works director, Bhupen Patel, seems confident this phase will be completed close to schedule — by March.

Park Street: Two developers, the Solaris Group headed by Park Street businessman Carlos Lopez, and Providian Builders run by Joseph and Frank Citino, go before the Economic Development Commission and present two vastly different plans to turn the southwest and northwest corners of Park and Main streets into gateway to Park Street. Meanwhile, the \$6 million streetscape project that includes benches and sidewalks proceeding on schedule.

Parking: Appraisal of Church Street Garage completed, repairs underway. Long-term plan in the works. Study of supply and demand for city parking to be put out to bid in September. Also next month, kickoff of pilot program to give discounts to monthly parkers at three city-owned garages for driving high-mileage vehicles. Transition of Morgan Street Garage from self-management to private contractor done without a hitch.

Capewell: Legislature's failure to pass the historic tax credit bill has slowed developer John Reveruzzi's plan to build 92 condos in the 102-year-old former horse nail factory. He is trying to qualify for other funding programs, or could charge more to lessen the need for subsidy. He has restored the ornate office building at the complex and moved his office there.

Front Street: Capital City Economic Development Authority hopes to close deal with Bradley Nitkin of Greenwich within weeks to develop retail-residential-entertainment portion of Adriaen's Landing. Groundbreaking in spring? Meanwhile, CCEDA completing construction of parking garage on site to serve commuters, downtown visitors. ESPN still plans entertainment facility on site.

Coltsville: With mortgage in hand and grants galore, Colt Gateway project galloping again. Residential renovation, renewal of historic east armory and streetscape assured. River access, national landmark status on radar. More parking a priority. State, city should make a deal with developer to swap or sell nearby building.

Connecticut Center for Science and Exploration: Long-wished-for groundbreaking set for Oct. 21. With almost \$4 million in recent donations, fundraising progress is impressive. Only \$18.5 million left toward goal of \$150 million. Construction manager hired in April. Two exhibit designers have been appointed. Summer science training program a huge success — expected to draw 100 teachers by end of August.

Convention Center/Hotel: This linchpin duo, the heart of Adriaen's Landing, is hereby retired from The Courant's thrice-yearly update. The convention center has been humming along since June 2, with an "extremely busy" July, according to a spokeswoman. Let the bookings office work overtime to ensure its success. The 408-room Downtown Marriott hotel's grand opening is Aug. 25, with Gov. M. Jodi Rell and J.W. Marriott Jr. as speakers. May it always be full.

Sage-Allen: Steel framework rapidly rising along Main Street on \$50 million residential project. Excavation also underway for parking garage on Market Street side of complex, which will include 78 rental apartments and 42 units for University of Hartford students. Garage will open in early 2006 and rest of complex, including retail, later in year — another boost for downtown.

Old State House: Gift shop elves working overtime to ready street-level store for November opening. Audio tour company recording bon mots. List of builders for bold, permanent exhibit has narrowed; winner to be chosen by Sept. 16. Then, listen for sounds of history in the making. Look for main attraction to open in March.

Riverfront: At last, construction to begin in the next two weeks on Riverwalk North, a 1,100-foot section of linear park along the Connecticut River. When complete (sometime next summer), Riverwalk North will link the north side of the Bulkeley Bridge with Riverside Park. Phase also includes significant landscaping around boathouse. Negotiations continue on property easements for Riverwalk South, a plan that includes breaching the dike and creating a park entrance off Van Dyke Avenue.

GRAPHIC BY PHIL LOHMAN / THE HARTFORD COURANT, TEXT BY EDITORIAL STAFF WRITERS

IN PLACE

Gung-Ho On Cities

Just one facet of Britain's revitalization push: 128,000 affordable housing units.

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Senator discusses Iraq, high court in Courant visit.

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EDITORIAL

So Many Cranes In So Little Time

Hartford, at last, is getting hot. The Courant began its Cranes & Scaffolds feature on Sept. 13, 1998, shortly after then-Gov. John G. Rowland laid out his vision for downtown's Six Pillars of Progress. The idea behind the editorial report card was to track major projects in the core of the capital city, from housing to parking to commercial enterprises, in order to spur its hoped-for renaissance.

At that time, skeptics outnumbered believers. Construction cranes were as rare a sight on the Hartford skyline as whooping

cranes. Today, they are a familiar part of the landscape.

Call us cockeyed optimists, but it seems as if the capital city has reached that flashpoint where perception meets reality and progress takes on momentum of its own.

Of the 19 projects receiving attention in today's report, 16 are accompanied by the symbols of a running man or a rocket, meaning those projects are moving along at a reasonable clip or rocketing toward completion. For the first time ever, none of the projects has been assigned the

dreaded stalled car. Significantly, the centerpiece of downtown development, the Connecticut Convention Center and hotel, at the state-subsidized development called Adriaen's Landing, retires after today from this feature. Stamp it "complete."

That doesn't mean Adriaen's Landing can yet be declared a success. Front Street, the all-important retail, residential and entertainment component across Columbus Boulevard from the convention center, has had a slow start and a checkered history. Its development is

still being negotiated. But it's useful to remember that in 1998, a football stadium was still on the drawing board for that vicinity. In hindsight, that would have been a huge mistake.

When Cranes & Scaffolds was first published seven years ago, the Civic Center, called "a monument to frustration" by The Courant back then, still lacked a buyer. The UConn stadium at Rentschler Field didn't exist. Housing downtown was practically nonexistent. The science

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