

Trolley Yard at former WRTA site picks up tenants

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WORCESTER — Spaces are filling up — and more are being created — at The Trolley Yard, a mixed-use development between Grove Street and Park Avenue.

Developer Michael O'Brien of Galaxy Development LLC said that all spaces in three completed buildings in the first phase of the development will be filled within the next two months.

“It’s 100 percent leased, and the next businesses will be opening in the next few weeks,” O’Brien said. “We’re happy with the way the project came out thus far — our tenants seem to be happy with the amount of activity and business they’re doing ... and we’re glad to do another project in Worcester — it’s our third or fourth — and another’s under construction, and we’re looking at another one now.”

Tenants currently include Starbucks Coffee, Chipotle Mexican Grill, Hot Table Panini, Orange Theory Fitness, Sprint, Gentle Dental, Island Fin Poke, Alpha Nails, and Sprint. Nkd waxing salon opened Monday.

Rockland Trust Bank, Workers Credit Union, and Fast Fix phone repair service are scheduled to open within the next few weeks, O’Brien said.

Meanwhile, construction is underway on the second phase of the development, a two-story, 40,500-square-foot mixed-use building at the corner of Sagamore Road and Grove Street.

That building is scheduled to be completed this summer, according to O’Brien.

It already has its first tenant.

The Goddard School will open an 11,000-square-foot franchise in the new building, offering early childhood education for children ages 6 weeks to 6 years old. It will be the first Goddard School in Worcester and the 15th in Massachusetts, according to Kristina Nasuti, media relations specialist with Goddard Systems Inc.

“I’m extremely excited to bring The Goddard School to this community,” said Sally Lo, the school’s on-site owner. “Because education is my passion, and I’ve always had a desire to start a business in this field, bringing a nationally-recognized play-based learning curriculum and education philosophy to this community is exciting for me.”

The sounds of children playing and learning would be quite a change at the 5.3-acre site.

The Grove Street property had been used for a bus and trolley maintenance facility, garage and vehicle storage yard since 1936. The Worcester Regional Transit Authority also housed its administrative offices at the property.

But the property was vacant after the WRTA relocated to its new \$84 million, 150,000-square-foot vehicle maintenance, storage and operations facility on Quinsigamond Avenue in October 2016.

Galaxy purchased the property from the WRTA for \$3.8 million in March 2016 through a request for proposals.

The company razed the buildings on the property, including the main 67,000-square-foot garage and a storage building that was roughly 15,500 square feet.

But the original redevelopment plans earned a rare rebuke from City Manager Edward M. Augustus in September 2017.

“I think the original design plan called for the buildings that were going to have their walls facing Park Avenue and Grove Street look like back walls and the more attractive parts of the buildings were facing into the parking lots,” Augustus said in an interview this week. “I thought it was going to create a kind of dead area, if you will.”

Augustus also said he wanted to encourage more engaged streetscapes, outdoor seating, and pedestrian accommodations so that the project didn’t look “just like a strip mall.”

“The developer did make some of the changes that we had hoped, maybe not as far as we’d like, but made some changes, and I appreciate that,” Augustus said. He added that the city is working on formulating design standards for development that may be presented to the Planning Board within the next year.

“It’s a balancing act: We want to make sure that we get the development we want, but don’t want to overregulate or burden developers so that it’s unaffordable or that Worcester’s not as attractive an option. ... If we found the right balance, that’s the kind of relationship we wanted.”

O’Brien said he appreciated the input.

“The most critical point of that request was to turn the building, so the backs didn’t face the street, and it turned out to be an excellent suggestion and benefit for the development,” O’Brien said. “I think it increases curb appeal, and we were happy to take the recommendation and develop in that manner.”

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