

Sustainability, innovation key to developer's plans for former Hazelwood LTV site

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By Mark Belko / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Take one look around the Mill 19 building at the 178-acre Almono site in Hazelwood, and it's easy to see why Gov. Tom Wolf found the vision for its future to be audacious.

Far from the high-tech hub envisioned by its developer, Mill 19 remains very much a dark, musty remnant of a former steel mill with dirt floors and a rusting shell.

But not for much longer if the Regional Industrial Development Corp., the developer, has its way.

It already has begun laying the groundwork to turn the hulking behemoth the size of five football fields into a centerpiece for innovation and sustainability on the city's last remaining brownfield.

Within the next week or so, RIDC plans to award a contract to begin the remediation of the site — the next step in plans to house three buildings geared toward technology and research within the superstructure of the old mill.

As part of the vision relayed to Mr. Wolf on Monday during a tour of the site, RIDC plans to install solar panels on the roof of Mill 19 — enough to generate all of the electricity for two of the three buildings.

All stormwater will stay on site, and big old cranes used in the mill's heyday will remain — as observation decks as part of the new development's many amenities.

The goal, said Don Smith, RIDC president, is to “create an experience for the user unlike anything else in the commonwealth.”

“We think it's going to be the coolest building in Pittsburgh,” he said.

RIDC officials hope to have the \$40 million first phase, a 95,000-square-foot building, completed in early 2019.

It's negotiating with Carnegie Mellon University's Advanced Robotics for Manufacturing Institute to take about two-thirds of the space and serve as the anchor tenant.

CMU is not new to the Almona site, having used it for robotics research in the past.

"We're close. We're making progress and we're all pretty bullish on the outcome," said Gary Fedder, the Institute's CEO, about the negotiations. "It's going to happen, but we need to work through a few details."

Mr. Smith said RIDC officials also are talking to a "large international technology company with a significant" presence in the United States about serving as the anchor tenant for the second building.

They also are in discussions with national and global technology companies about establishing a location at the site as well, he said. Many want to be close to Carnegie Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh and their talent pools, he noted.

"We really view this as a catalyst to bringing other development to the site," he said. "That's why it's so important to get this first one done and get those marquee names here, to bring the other players."

Part of the vision also is to reconnect the site to the Hazelwood neighborhood and its business district — to do the development "with Hazelwood, not in Hazelwood," as Mr. Smith put it.

Mr. Wolf said it was heartening to hear that RIDC and the foundations that make up the Almona partnership that owns the site were "trying to re-establish that connection in a way that pays tribute to Pittsburgh's current incarnation as a high-tech capital."

So far, the state has invested \$20 million in the redevelopment of the 178-acre site, the former LTV Coke Works, on the Monongahela riverfront.

More than \$2 million has been earmarked for the work on the Mill building. Overall, that project will run about \$120 million.

As part of his visit, Mr. Wolf also toured the Hazelwood business district, which is showing signs of resurgence.

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