

When the dust clears, an arts district will emerge

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[The vacant building at 776 Granby was torn down late last month so property owners could better sell the former Bank of the Commonwealth property.](#)

By Lydia Wheeler

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Late last month, a demolition claw tore down the former Zedd's building in Norfolk's newly formed arts district.

The 17,497-square-foot building on 0.33 acres at 776 Granby St., now owned by Southern Bank, has been vacant for a number of years and the roof was caving in. Patrick Gill, of CBRE|Hampton Roads, is listing the former Bank of the Commonwealth property at an asking price of \$1.05 million once it's cleared.

Built in 1910, the building has had many uses over the years. It was home to a milk company followed by the Norfolk-Baltimore Ice Cream Co. before a number of different auto dealers and auto mechanics occupied the space. The last tenant was Col. Calvin Zedd, a veteran Hampton Roads auctioneer, who used the space to sell used office furniture and restaurant equipment, said Bill Inge, a building historian with the Norfolk Public Library Sargeant Memorial Collection.

"The building was in really bad condition," he said. "I was there taking pictures the other day and looked in the front window and a good portion of the roof was on the floor."

The demolition of a dilapidated structure is another step in revitalizing the area surrounding Granby Street north of Brambleton Avenue. In May, Norfolk City Council approved designating the area an Arts and Design District and amended the D4 - downtown cultural and convention center district - zoning to allow antique stores, breweries, consignment shops, flea markets, educational facilities, art studios, dance studios, cafes and used book stores. Area businesses have already started capitalizing on the new uses.

The Beauty Parlor By Q + Co., across the street at 767 Granby, is expanding into the adjacent space at 765 Granby and investing \$30,000 to open a cafe and event venue.

Salon owner and stylist Quincy Brown said The Parlor on Granby will be different than the average cafe, but fitting to the arts district. Coffee will be served from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m., while art openings, comedy shows and musical theater will light up the space from 5 p.m. to 2 a.m. The goal is to open by Nov. 1.

"When we got here, it was a ghost town and to see the building torn down and hear talks and plans, I feel very fortunate to have opened a business at ground zero of this revolution," he said. "I think it's amazing. I'm ecstatic about it."

Next door, the Hurrah Players are close to closing on the former Texaco building at 759 Granby St. The nonprofit theater company is using the 15,000-square-foot space as an open performing space, to add additional classrooms and as a workshop to design and build props and sets.

"It would be in addition to, not in place of our home on St. Paul's Boulevard," said the group's general manager, Katie Stone. "The purchase price is \$1.2 million."



Though in existence since 1984, the Hurrah Players has owned the 5,000-square-foot building on St. Paul's Boulevard since January 2010. The group was previously located on Woodrow Avenue off 21st Street in Ghent. Stone said the move downtown has increased the theater's visibility and programming exponentially. The additional space in the arts district, she said, is essential in order to add classes and meet the demands of the community.

The closing is scheduled for the end of October.

Up the street, at 806 Granby St., a new arts studio is in the process of opening. Alchemy NFK began leasing the 12,000-square-foot space in June and president Careyann Weinberg said the grand opening is planned for October.

"We are a studio gallery and artist co-op that serves as a venue for the arts," she said. "We're a brand-new studio incorporated in May."

Alchemy NFK will have nine to 12 resident artists occupying studio spaces and though they will show their work in-house semi-annually, Weinberg said the goal is to bring in art from all over, be it locally or nationwide.

"We are not just a fine arts space," she said. "It's a very large focus on music and performance art of all kinds."

Guests can expect to see everything from ballet to punk bands.

State law says the city can offer businesses that locate in a designated arts district a number of economic incentives, but what those will be have yet to be determined. Norfolk Planning Director Frank Duke said the city is still evaluating its options.nib

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