

# The Virginian-Pilot

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## As Norfolk makes over Selden Arcade, new shops and a high-tech “maker studio” may be coming

By Eric Hartley  
The Virginian-Pilot  
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A rendering shows an example of the new food stalls planned for the Selden Arcade in downtown Norfolk.



Steve Earley | The Virginian-Pilot  
Work at Selden Arcade in Norfolk continues after the April 2015 explosion that damaged the building, photographed on Friday, Aug. 14, 2015.

NORFOLK

Nearly two years after it was seriously damaged in an explosion, downtown's Selden Arcade is ready for its next chapter.

The city-owned 1931 building has long been a connector between Plume and Main streets.

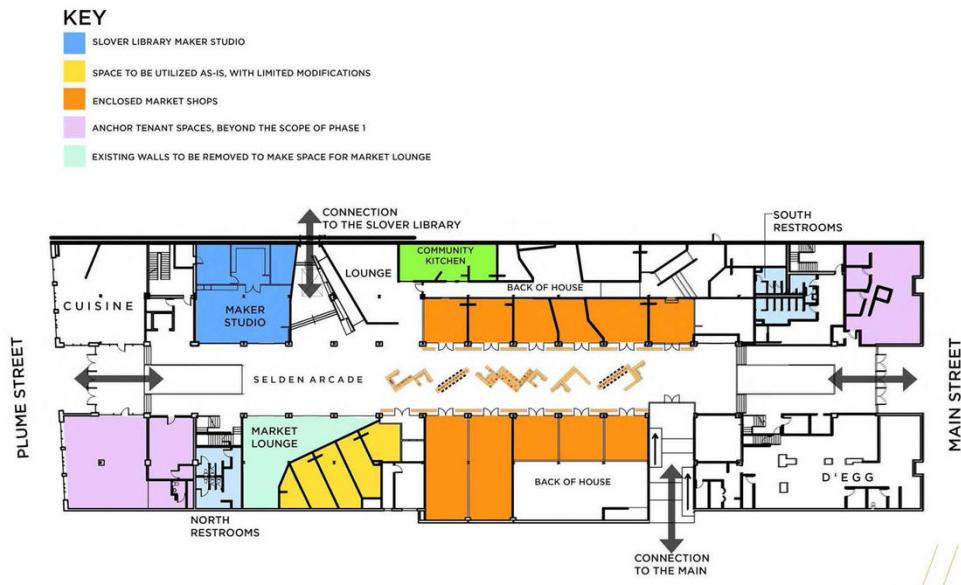
That neighborhood looks radically different than it did just a few years ago.

The Slover Library opened in 2015, and Norfolk's new hotel-conference center, The Main, had its grand opening last weekend. The long, narrow Selden Arcade sits right between the two.

A plan presented to the City Council on Tuesday calls for startup shops and food stalls inside the arcade, as well as a Slover Library-run "maker studio," with 3-D printers, a recording studio, a laser cutter and other high-tech equipment.

The city also will create "connectors" – essentially, covered walkways – to encourage people to roam between the library, The Main and the arcade. They're scheduled to be finished in August.

Photos I Making the connection



Courtesy of the city of Norfolk

A plan for the future of downtown Norfolk's Selden Arcade envisions new shops and food stalls, as well as a high-tech "maker studio" run by the Slover Library.



Courtesy of the city of Norfolk  
A city plan envisions new shops and food stalls in downtown Norfolk's Selden Arcade, which will be a connector between the Slover Library and city's new hotel-conference center, The Main.



Courtesy of the city of Norfolk  
A rendering shows the planned connection between the Slover Library and Selden Arcade in downtown Norfolk.



Courtesy of the city of Norfolk

A rendering shows the planned connection between the Slover Library and Selden Arcade in downtown Norfolk.



Courtesy of the city of Norfolk  
A rendering shows the planned connection between the Selden Arcade and The Main in downtown Norfolk.

And about that name: The Selden Arcade has no video games – “arcade” is used in its historic sense, meaning an arched, covered passageway.

The Downtown Norfolk Council will rent much of the arcade from the city and use it as a “retail incubator,” leasing small spaces – about 200 to 400 square feet each – to first-time business owners, council President Mary Miller said. The first ones could open in the fall.

Terms of the lease between the city and the downtown council haven’t been completed, Deputy City Manager Wynter Benda said.

The incubator is an offshoot of the downtown council’s “Vibrant Spaces” program, which offered incentives to lure new businesses downtown and improve existing ones.

Almost 100 people applied for the grants in 2015. The program helped open a print shop, a dog wash and a crepe maker – Prince Ink, Muddy Paws and Lamia’s, respectively. Other businesses, including Brick Anchor Brew-House and Work I Release, also got help.

But Miller said most of the spaces available were too big for first-time business

owners. The tiny slots at the Selden Arcade could be a better fit for “retailers that need some nurturing,” she said.

There will likely be 10 or 11 retail slots in the arcade, Miller said, with two or three set aside as “mentor spaces.” Established businesses will occupy them and offer advice to their greener neighbors. The idea is for successful startups to move out of the incubator into their own spaces, ensuring a regular supply of new shops.

Low rents and short leases will encourage entrepreneurs to take risks, said Drew Ungvarsky, who runs the marketing firm Grow and heads the Downtown Norfolk Council’s Vibrant Spaces committee. There also will be kiosks people can rent by the week or even by the day for “pop-up” businesses, he said.

“We have no idea exactly what’s going to come forward,” Ungvarsky said.

The initial plan calls for the retail incubator – modeled after markets in cities including Atlanta, Nashville and Portland – to operate for two to three years. What happens after that will depend on how it goes.

The city and the downtown council hope the changes downtown in recent years will mean lots of foot traffic through the arcade. Besides The Main and the Slover Library, a 275-unit luxury apartment tower, Icon, is scheduled to open in the fall just a block down Main Street.

Photos | Out of the ashes



Sargeant Memorial Collection  
Firefighters extinguish an April 4, 1930, fire that destroyed the Academy of Music in downtown Norfolk.



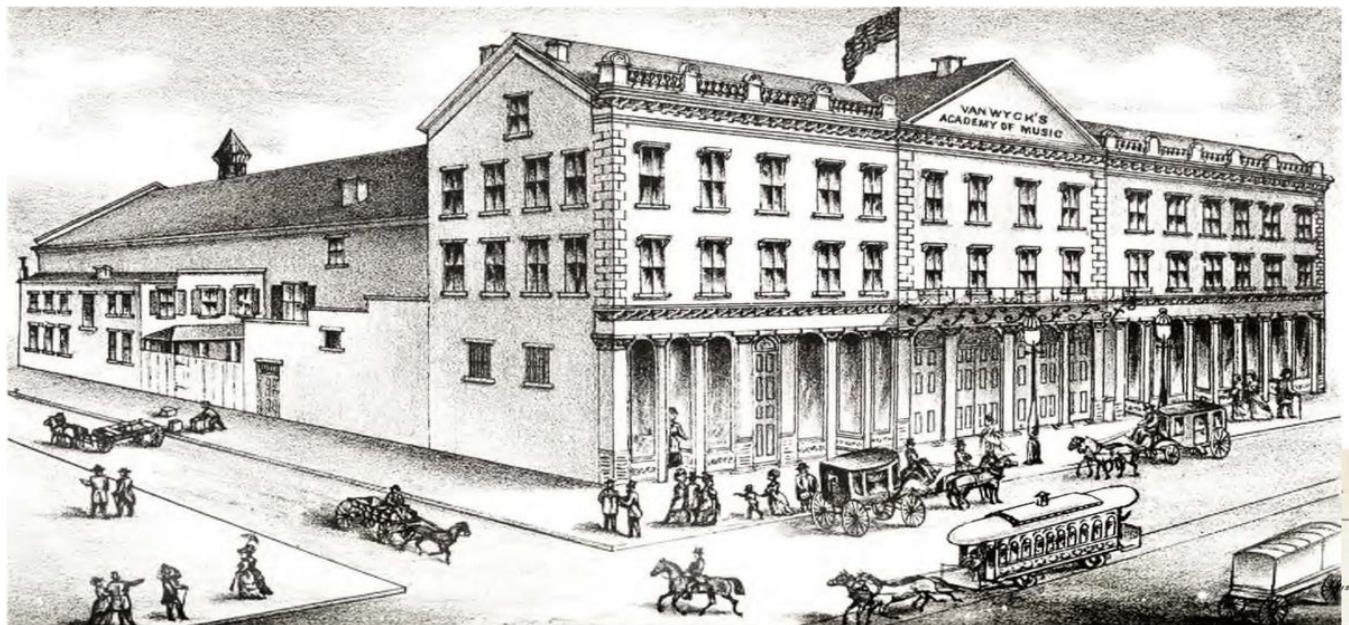
Sargeant Memorial Collection  
Firefighters extinguish an April 4, 1930, fire that destroyed the Academy of Music in downtown Norfolk.



Sargeant Memorial Collection  
An April 4, 1930, fire destroyed the Academy of Music in downtown Norfolk.



Sargeant Memorial Collection  
The aftermath of an April 4, 1930, fire that destroyed the Academy of Music in downtown Norfolk.



Courtesy of the city of Norfolk  
The Academy of Music as it appeared in downtown Norfolk in the 1880s.



Courtesy of the city of Norfolk  
Construction on the Selden Arcade, which opened in 1931.



Sargeant Memorial Collection  
The Selden Arcade as it looked in 1931, the year it opened.



Sargeant Memorial Collection  
The Selden Arcade, seen in 1950.



Courtesy of the city of Norfolk  
The inside of the Selden Arcade in 1982, the year it became a small shopping center.



Courtesy of the city of Norfolk  
The outside of the Selden Arcade in 1982, the year it became a small shopping center.



Martin Smith-Rodden | The Virginian-Pilot  
The Selden Arcade was renovated in 2005 to make way for the d'Art Center.



Teresa Annas | Virginian-Pilot file photo  
In June 2005, resident artists at the d'Art Center, eager to see their new home, peered into the glass entry on the Main Street end of the Selden Arcade.



Rich-Joseph Facun | The Virginian-Pilot  
An explosion sprayed glass across the Selden Arcade on April 17, 2015. D'Art Center residents moved their galleries and workshops to the NEON arts district in 2016.



Rich-Joseph Facun | The Virginian-Pilot  
An explosion at the Selden Arcade closed several streets around the building, Saturday, April 18, 2015.

Tuesday's presentation to the City Council came 87 years to the day after a fire destroyed the Academy of Music, whose property included the site where the Selden Arcade now sits.

When the arcade opened in 1931, the year [after the fire](#), it featured a barber shop, a furniture store and a shoe store. Later it was home to small offices, and in 1982, it became a shopping center.

The city bought Selden in 2003 after its owner threatened to tear it down. For a decade, it served as a cultural arts center.

On April 17, 2015, a contractor's accidental strike of a power line [caused a massive explosion](#) that sent shattered glass flying through the arcade.

No one was injured, but several interior walls collapsed, and an exterior wall cracked and shifted. A later review by an engineering firm turned up unrelated structural problems.

The repairs cost the city about \$800,000, though insurance reimbursed all but about \$69,000, a city spokeswoman said.

The d'Art Center, which offers art classes and studio space, moved out of the Selden Arcade after the explosion and is now in the NEON arts district.

Some on the City Council were skeptical of the incubator plan. Mayor Kenny Alexander said he wants the city to get market rent out of the arcade, and Councilwoman Angelia Williams Graves doubted tourist traffic will sustain the startup businesses.

Other council members – Martin Thomas Jr., Andria McClellan and Theresa Whibley – were supportive.

"This is what progressive cities are doing, and they're being successful," Thomas said.

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