

Downtown organization puts out call for new businesses to fill retail incubator beside The Main

By Elisha Sauers
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A rendering shows an example of the new food stalls planned for the Selden Arcade in downtown Norfolk.



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.



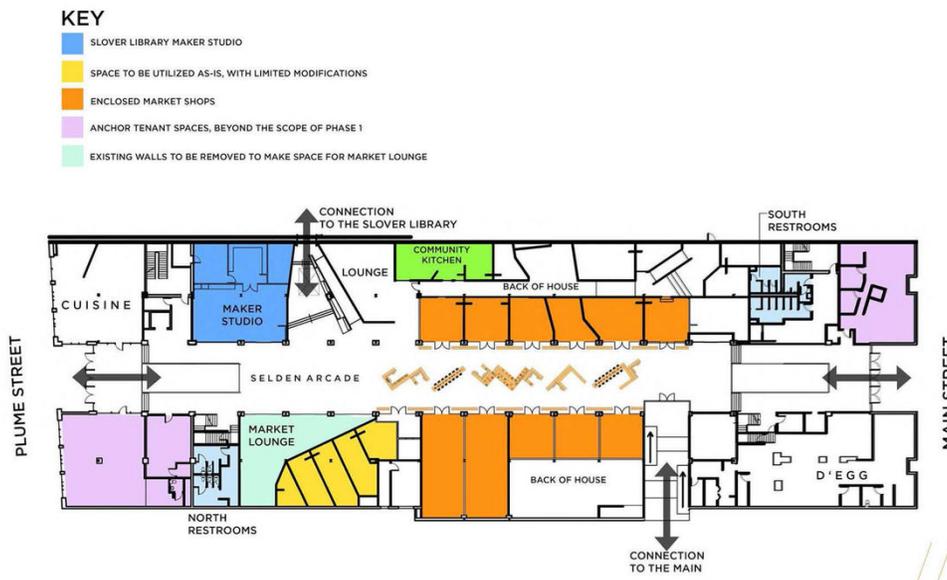
Courtesy of the city of Norfolk

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 Selden Arcade and The Main in downtown Norfolk.



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.

NORFOLK

Downtown Norfolk Council is looking for businesses to fill a “retail incubator” in a key building that connects Plume and Main streets and sidles up to two prominent properties.

The incubator is within [the Selden Arcade, a historic city-owned building](#), wedged between The Main, the new hotel-conference center, and the Slover Library. It has entrances on both Plume and Main and will connect with the two buildings.

Norfolk bought the Selden after its owner threatened to raze it in 2003. It served as a cultural arts center until April 2015, when a contractor’s strike to a power line caused an explosion in the arcade. The repairs cost the city about \$800,000, though insurance reimbursed all but \$69,000, a city spokeswoman said.

The incubator will be known as Selden Market, an offshoot of the council’s Vibrant Spaces program, which [offered seed money and discounted rent to lure new businesses downtown](#). The council brought Muddy Paws, Lamia’s Crepes and The Prince Ink Co. to Granby Street through the program last year.

Mary Miller, president of the council, said the organization learned from that experience.

“There was such a demand for small spaces,” she said. “How do you solve that problem?”

The market will include 11 retail rental spaces, 10 kiosks, lounges and seating areas, and an incubator kitchen.

Though not involved in the incubator, Bruce Thompson, the developer of The Main, has had discussions about the Selden Arcade behind the scenes. In emails obtained by The Virginian-Pilot through a public records request, Thompson wrote to interim City Manager Doug Smith and Deputy City Manager Wynter Benda about the building Feb. 28.

“Each end of the arcade should be all glass even if you have to give a change order,” Thompson wrote. “Tenants and pedestrians should not feel like they are going into a building.”

Thompson went on to offer more advice: “Get rid (of) taco stand, limit seating, get tie store and jewelry and create truly a vibrant space by opening the ends and I think you have something.”

His email also asked whether the officials could join him for a meeting with the CEO of Beecroft & Bull, a men’s clothing company that used to be in one of the anchor spaces. Benda responded, thanking him for his input.

“I have noted your question and suggestions and will call you offline to answer and discuss,” Benda said.

Thompson said Wednesday he arranged the meeting and has discussed Selden with the city because he’s interested in its success and compatibility with The Main.

“The Main is more than just a hotel in downtown Norfolk. It’s about creating a destination,” he said. “The connectivity into the Selden, and the Selden into the Slover, could help create the epicenter downtown.”

Miller said she’d love to see Beecroft & Bull return but hasn’t spoken with the retailer.

Each of the incubator spaces will rent from \$225 to \$325 per month with six-month leases. Spaces for “mentors,” established businesses that can share expertise with the startups, are available for \$550 to \$900 per month with one-year leases and optional renewals.

Pop-up booths, spaces for testing new products or services, can be rented for \$100 per week or \$300 per month.

The council will accept entries through July 13 and announce the selected businesses Aug. 4. The market is expected to open this fall and continue for two to three years.

Applications are available at www.seldenmarket.com, along with information on floor plans and amenities included with tenant packages.

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