

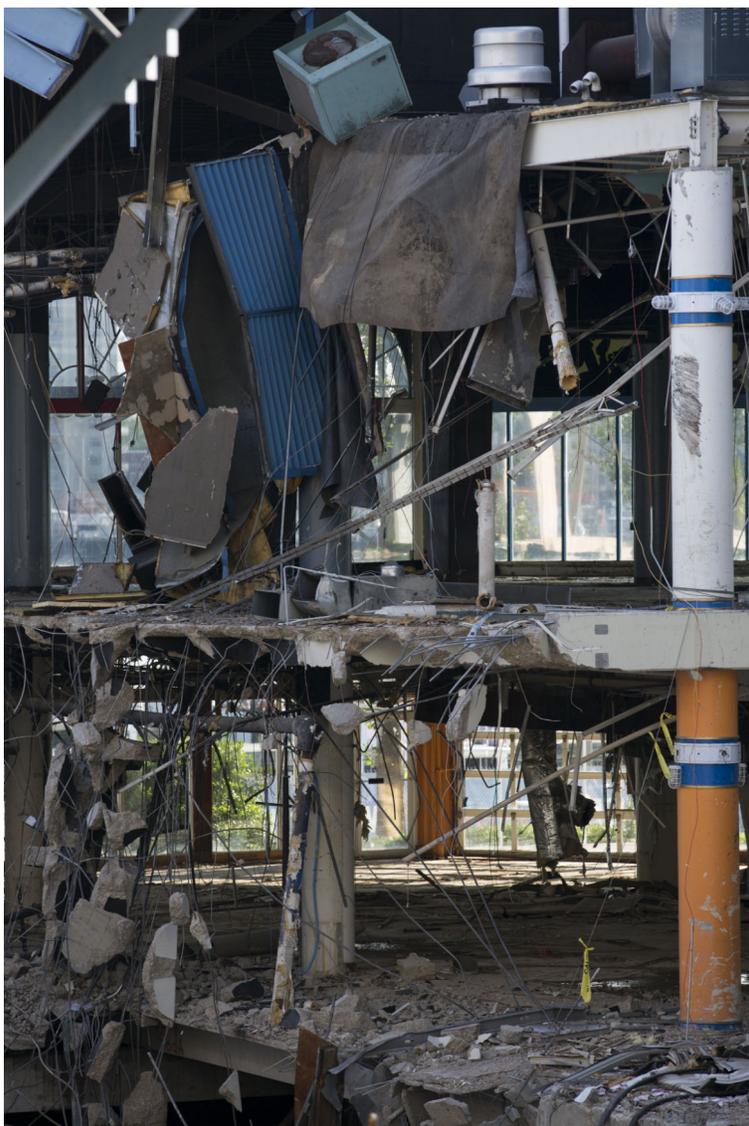
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Roger Chesley: In with the old and the new

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Roger Chesley



A look at the progress in the demolition work at Waterside, Norfolk on Wednesday evening, May 25, 2016.

I thought the repurposed Waterside District was supposed to be all modern and inviting, in addition to family-friendly and fun. Oh, and it also would generate hundreds of jobs, help boost the ongoing revitalization of downtown Norfolk and provide more tax dollars.

Not that city leaders want too much.

So imagine my amazement that some old-time sweetness is being added to the mix of shops, restaurants, entertainment and outdoor bocce. The reappearance of singing fudgemeisters – belting out tunes beside copper kettles, huge stirrers and marble slabs – is enough to give me sugar shock.

City officials just announced that The Fudgery, an original tenant when Waterside opened in 1983, will return to Norfolk when the revamped structure reopens – presumably in spring 2017. The company began on the Outer Banks; the Waterside spot was its second store.

Other Waterside tenants will include Cogan's Pizza, Carolina Cupcakery and Starr Hill Brewery.

The new Fudgery will occupy 1,000 square feet in the Waterside District. I have just two words: mind blown. I wouldn't have predicted this nod to nostalgia in an era of smartphones, driverless cars and incessant social media updates.

This is just so unhip. And so refreshing.

The Cordish Cos. is the Baltimore-based firm behind the reinvention of the long-suffering marketplace on Waterside Drive, and it's spending \$40 million on this latest reboot. The company has demolished the 35,000-square-foot annex, which was added in the 1990s.

Workers were trucking away debris when I stopped by the site Friday. Interior walls and ceilings have already been removed from the main building.

Some background: The old Waterside languished for years, due in no small part to the opening of MacArthur Center in 1999 and the rebirth of Granby Street. Foot traffic inside the old Waterside was basically nil. I wrote in 2011, only a little tongue in cheek, that [the city should](#) blow it up and start over. At the time, officials were pondering whether to spend millions to subsidize operations and capital improvements.

A lengthy period of talks – I'd called it tortured – occurred. The City Council finally approved a deal in August 2013 for Cordish to redevelop Waterside. A Cordish

representative had said in March 2014 that construction would begin at the end of that year. A ceremonial “groundbreaking” took place in August 2015.

Cordish has since spread out announcements on merchants who will set up shop.

Will The Fudgery’s back-to-the-future move work? Some think so. They include folks who posted on the city’s Facebook page. “I’m so excited!” wrote one woman. “Many childhood and teenage memories going here. Remember when they use to ring the bell, sing and cover each other in fudge ...”

Councilman Tommy Smigiel was similarly stoked, and said so at a City Council work session this week.

“As a child who grew up in the ’80s in Norfolk, that was where we went, and it’s exciting to see some of the old returning back.”

Reed Cordish is vice president of development at The Cordish Cos.

“Just a little of the nostalgia could be a cool thing,” he told The Virginian-Pilot earlier this year.

Fancy that: Praising the past as part of our future.

It’s enough to make you tune up your vocal cords.