

Forgotten Syracuse neighborhood is suddenly a hotbed of construction activity

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Syracuse, N.Y. -- A Southside neighborhood that has not seen any significant economic investment in decades is suddenly buzzing with bulldozers and construction workers.

[JMA Wireless](#) opened its new \$50 million headquarters and 5G components factory on the former site of Coyne Textile on Tallman Street in February. It is expected to bring 200 jobs to the site. Construction recently began nearby on Syracuse Community Health Center's new [\\$22.5 million home](#) on South Salina Street.

And just a block away, construction kicked off Thursday on [Salina 1st](#), a \$10 million development that will transform a vacant, polluted property into a 52,000-square-foot facility containing residential, retail, light industrial and office space.

The project is headed by two African American developers, Emanuel Henderson, of JHP Industrial Supply Co, and Eli Smith, of E. Smith Contractors, along with Gail Montplaisir, a real estate development professional from Washington, D.C.

The development team held a groundbreaking ceremony at the project site at 1081 S. Salina St. Thursday morning. It was the second groundbreaking for the project. The first was held in the spring of 2019, with construction set to kick off in the fall of that year. But the coronavirus pandemic put a hold on the project.

This time, bulldozers were on-hand to actually start construction.

"We've been here before, but we haven't been here with bulldozers before," said Henderson.

Rendering depicts Salina 1st, a 52,000-square-foot mixed-use facility to be built at 1081 S. Salina St. in Syracuse. The project will contain residential, retail, light industrial and office space. (Courtesy of Norman Smith Architecture)

The project will consist of two adjoining buildings on two acres of land within walking distance of the Centro Transit Hub.

The New York State Energy Research Development Authority is providing a \$1 million grant through its Carbon Neutral Community Economic Development program. Smith said the all-electric building, equipped with solar panels, will be self-powered and will give off no carbon emissions.

Construction is expected to take 12 to 18 months, though Montplaisir said supply chain issues caused by the pandemic could mean it will take longer.

She said she hopes the project, along with the other development happening in the area, is the start of a revitalization effort that will bring needed jobs to the Southside, one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in the city.

“We have to make change, and Salina 1st is just one step toward doing that,” said Montplaisir.

Montplaisir has been building single-family to large mixed-use projects in underdeveloped areas of Washington, D.C., for more than 30 years. She and Smith met at a small-business conference in Massachusetts in 2016, where Smith asked her to join him and Henderson in developing the project in Syracuse.

Mayor Ben Walsh said the fact that two Black developers are driving the project is significant.

“The fact that we have a Black-owned development project happening right here, right now, sends a powerful message to the community that there is another way to do it,” he said.

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