

# CONNECTICUT POST

‘GOING FROM NOTHING TO SOMETHING’

## **A second chance for a first impression**

**Renovation of a dilapidated building next to Interstate 95 aims to present a more attractive face of Bridgeport**

**By Hugh Bailey | October 29, 2014**

Bridgeport is trying to improve its first impressions.

The long-vacant Bridgeport Metal Goods factory, mere feet from the Interstate 95 on-ramp headed northbound at exit 25, is the kind of dilapidated site that can stop people from investing in the city, Mayor Bill Finch said.

“So much has to do with face of the market, the confidence that people have,” he said.

Work is underway to turn the building into a U-Haul storage and truck-rental facility. When complete, the building should look as it did in the city’s industrial heyday, and create 35 to 50 permanent jobs, officials said.

“We’re going from nothing to something here,” Finch said. “That’s good news.”

The property, at 365 Cherry St., includes nine buildings with about 146,000 square feet on 3.22 acres.

The business will offer truck and trailer rentals along with a full line of moving and storage supplies. Construction began several weeks ago and is expected to take about a year. U-Haul also has Bridgeport facilities on Boston Avenue and on Fairfield Avenue.

Bridgeport Metal Goods occupied the building from its construction in 1916 until 1980. As many as 600 people worked there, making products like flashlights, lipstick holders, and jar and bottle caps. It served as a warehouse until 2011, but has been empty since then.

U-Haul bought the building this summer.

Environmental contamination is common in old factory buildings, and usually includes problems with lead, asbestos and oil that dripped from machinery, Finch said. The interior of the building, with hardwood floors and skylights, will need refurbishment to fit modern needs.

U-Haul supports in-fill development, as opposed to sprawl, and adaptive reuse of existing buildings, officials said, because they save energy for the city and company.

“This facility is located in an area of town that has been in decline for many years,” U-Haul official Patrick Keefe said in a news release. “U-Haul is the first of many businesses helping to revitalize the area and bring it back to its former condition.”

The company declined to return calls for more information about its plans.

Finch lauded the progress in a part of town that is clearly visible for people passing through on the highway. He said the city’s nearby Eco-Technology Park has been a major success, citing a pending expansion of Bronx, N.Y.-based Tri-State Biodiesel and the soon-to-arrive Green Depot, a company that uses recycled materials for building.

On the other side of I-95, at the former American Graphophone Co. site, a plan is in the early stages to turn the buildings into housing, retail and a school.

“We’re seeing a lot of enthusiasm,” Finch said. “It’s all really taking off.”

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