



## Plainwell mill project progresses after old water works building is demolished

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By **Sharon Sturdevant | Special to the Kalamazoo Gazette**

PLAINWELL — The view in downtown Plainwell changed dramatically Monday when workers knocked down the old water works building in Fannie Pell Park to make room for a new entrance into the vacant paper mill property.

It's another step forward as city leaders and a private developer work **to revitalize the 36-acre parcel.**

"There was tangible, visible movement in bricks and mortar," Plainwell City Manager Erik Wilson said. "It just opened up the whole front of the mill property and highlighted the possibilities we've got planned."

The city is working with Conestoga-Rovers & Associates to redevelop the 36-acre parcel in two phases.

City leaders hope the property eventually will include a mixture of commercial, business and residential ventures along with some green spaces.

But, since the property is part of a federal Superfund site the city purchased years after Plainwell Paper Co. declared bankruptcy in November 2000, there are a lot of details to tackle.

"Implementing the plans is a long process," CRA Project Manager Nick White said.

"It doesn't always look like a lot of things are happening, but there has been a lot of progress behind the scenes recently."



Mark Bugnaski / Kalamazoo Gazette

A crew from Pitsch demolishes the old water works building at Fannie Pell Park in Plainwell as work continues for the parking lot expansion.

Lots of surveyors, engineers and architects have been working on the property in the past few months.

Some teams are gathering environmental data required by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency before the new pedestrian bridge into the mill property can be installed and plans set to remove some of the unwanted buildings on the mill property.

Other teams are drawing designs to install an elevator and modify common areas so CRA can move its local offices that house about 30 employees from Kalamazoo on to the mill property, White said.

CRA also has dealt in recent months with a lot of paperwork and organizational issues needed to move the project forward, White said.

For example, in February, city council members agreed that CRA could establish CRA 200 Allegan St. LLC so **the private developer can capture nearly \$590,000 in Brownfield redevelopment tax credits** awarded in February by the Michigan Economic Growth Authority for the mill project.

Meanwhile, workers continue with the \$710,000 project in Pell Park to create more parking for downtown businesses and establish a main entry into the mill property.

Workers with Apex of Dorr are constructing a new building on the south edge of Pell Park to house utility connections, public restrooms and kayak storage. Additional parking and a circular driveway will be put where the old water works building stood.

"The new bridge has been ordered and should be delivered by early May," Wilson said. "It just seems like we're finally getting closer and closer to opening the front door of the revitalized mill."

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