

COMING ATTRACTIONS

Arsenal Yards Reconnects With Watertown History

Redevelopment Incorporates Gantry Crane at Cinema

By Bill McQuillan | Special to Banker & Tradesman | Oct 26, 2018



A 60-foot gantry crane from the Watertown Arsenal will be displayed in the lobby of the new cinema at Arsenal Yards.

By 2020, Watertown's Arsenal Yards will be a thriving new neighborhood comprised of over more than 1 million square feet of development including 250,000 square feet of curated shops and eclectic eateries, 200,000 square feet of new and existing creative office and life science space, 425 contemporary residences and a 150-room Hampton Inn & Suites by Hilton. The development will also include dedicated green space, access to a revitalized Arsenal Park, connection to the Watertown-Cambridge multi-use pathway and an accessible pedestrian/bicycle path to the Charles River.

The heart and soul of Arsenal Yards is a connection to its heritage and a commitment to its future. Intertwining the past and the present, Arsenal Yards will re-expose the two original Arsenal buildings and create a truly unique neighborhood street environment.

The original shopping center was developed in the 1980s using a combination of the historic buildings and new construction to create a mall connection. We purchased it five years ago with the intent of re-exposing the beauty of the existing buildings, adding a mix of uses including residential, offices and a hotel. The goal is to activate the pedestrian experience, bring an energized mixed-use experience to the street edge, and reestablish the river, park and community connections. We have since torn down all of the structure that was added in the 1980s and are in the process of rehabilitating the historic buildings, celebrating the beautiful masonry, grand openings and steel structure.



Bill McQuillan

A Dramatic Juxtaposition of Old and New

In addition, the existing buildings will be complemented by new construction that will incorporate elements of the historic structure without trying to mimic the historic design, thereby creating a dramatic juxtaposition of the authentic historic buildings and new contemporary construction. In mid-October we moved a historic 60-foot gantry crane in one of the existing buildings into the space to be occupied by The Majestic at Arsenal Yards. This original massive crane will remain and be incorporated into the architecture of the cinema and displayed in the lobby as an homage to the history of the Arsenal.

In addition to weaving historic components into our overall architecture, our street names are inspired by Watertown and its rich history. A testament to Abby Eldridge's spirit, resilience and activism, Eldridge Avenue pays tribute to an employee of the Watertown Arsenal during the Civil War who petitioned for women's rights including better wages, treatment and safer conditions.

Throughout the neighborhood you'll also see tributes to "Bond," including Bond Street, Bond Square and our residential offerings, Blvd & Bond. Before James Bond, there lived a real-life hero, William Bond, one of the founders of Watertown and the first speaker of The Massachusetts Province House of Representatives in 1692.

Additionally, we've been involved in creating a regional mixed-use zoning district in Watertown as it embraces smart growth that will enrich the community for generations. The vision that the town had come up with over the last five years – its economic development plan and comprehensive plan which was their vision for this part of Watertown – was perfectly in sync with the type of development we contemplated. We're starting to see that come to fruition.

The existing 14-acre Arsenal Park is in the process of being reimagined with our input. In addition to existing uses including youth baseball, soccer and tennis, we are working with the town to design space to activate community gardens, new bike paths, connections to the river and a possible area for outdoor concerts and entertainment.

Bill McQuillan is principal at Boston-based Boylston Properties.