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Demolition of vacant Navy buildings marks 'progress' at SouthField



PHOTO/ Christian Schiavone/The Patriot Ledger

The old Navy chapel at SouthField will be torn down over the next few weeks. It's one of more than a dozen derelict Navy buildings slated for demolition.

WEYMOUTH – The door of the old SouthField chapel stood wide open Wednesday morning revealing the stripped interior and a crude face spray-painted on the back wall.

Crews started clearing out mold and other material from the chapel and the old on-base store next to it this week. Demolition of the two buildings is scheduled to be completed over the next few weeks. They will be the first of the more than a dozen derelict Navy buildings to come down in about two years.

The project's master developer LStar Management plans to tear down more buildings in the spring, LStar Managing Partner Kyle Corkum said.

"It's just the start," he said. "We're eager to begin demolishing those buildings that are just eyesores."

There are about 25 buildings left over from the property's past life as the South Weymouth Naval Air Station, which closed in 1997. LStar decided to save some of the buildings, including an aircraft hangar converted into film studio space and a fire station. The rest are slated to be torn down.

Town officials had urged the project's previous master developer Starwood Land Ventures to move ahead with tearing the buildings down, saying they were riddled with mold and posed a safety hazard to the vandals who frequently found their way inside. Starwood said it couldn't move ahead with demolition until long-stalled development sped up.

LStar took over the project in May.

Town Councilor Michael Smart, whose district includes SouthField, was among those who called for Starwood get rid of the old Navy buildings. He said the demolition of chapel and PX is part of the new momentum since LStar took over.

"It's a good sign for the project, it's a good sign for Weymouth and it's a good sign for the community," he said. "I'm excited about the progress and to see this thing moving forward."

Corkum said the chapel and the PX will be torn down first because they're in the middle of several public parks and the gymnasium that LStar plans to reopen soon.

LStar plans to save the beams and weathervane from the chapel to use incorporate into shade structures and trail heads elsewhere on the project. The land where the chapel and PX now stand will be made into park space, Corkum said.

LStar also saved the pews from the chapel and has offered to give them to couples who were married there.

The chapel and PX will be the first of the leftover Navy buildings to be torn down since another aircraft hangar was torn down in 2013 to make way for a parkway cutting across the base.

Officials from the state Department of Transportation announced last week that a \$6.5 million extension of the parkway to Trotter Road in Weymouth could begin in the spring.

Plans for SouthField, which includes land in Weymouth, Rockland and Abington, call for 2,855 homes and apartments and up to 2 million square feet of commercial space. The town council is considering LStar's request for zoning changes to increase that to 3,885 residential units and 3 million square feet of commercial.

About 600 people now live at SouthField.

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