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Much of the former Harper's store in downtown Seneca has been demolished as part of a project to rehabilitate and repurpose the Harper's and Kimbrell's buildings.

## City official says Harper's work 'progressing nicely'

BY NORM CANNADA  
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SENECA — Work to rehabilitate and repurpose a more-than-century-old Seneca property that has been vacant for more than a decade is continuing as part of an ongoing effort to enhance the downtown area.

Construction and demolition at the former Harper's Five and Dime store is expected to take several more months, according to Seneca city administrator Scott Moulder. The plan is to build three "shell buildings" to be sold to



COURTESY CITY OF SENECA

Seneca city officials are working to rehabilitate the former Harper's and Kimbrell's stores in downtown as part of its efforts to continue to draw people and businesses to the area.

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# HARPER'S: 'Coming out of the ground

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businesses and construct a new public park on the site.

Officials had planned to leave much of the former Harper's store property intact, but learned late last year the façade on the Main Street side, along with much of the building, couldn't be saved.

"It's progressing nicely now that we've put the construction in motion," Moulder told *The Journal* earlier this week. "The demolition is nearing completion. If you visit the site now, you'll see the majority of the building has disappeared.

"We had our first follow-up meeting, and they are attempting to preserve as many

of the bricks as possible that aren't falling apart," he added. "That way we can incorporate those into the park. As soon as they complete the demolition, they'll begin working on preparing the site for footings and hopefully, we'll be coming out of the ground with our new building in the very near future."

He said the current "deliver by" date for the project is July, but added availability of materials and other issues like weather delays could push the date back further.

"We had one of the wettest Januarys in history, so that's certainly delayed some of the work," Moulder said, adding much of the city's responsibil-

ity would be completed in the summer.

Businesses that purchase the three buildings would be responsible for additional work needed to get the building ready for the business. Park construction is likely to take longer.

Moulder said some are already asking about the shell buildings, but the city isn't ready to consider any offers yet.

"There will still be three buildings for sale, all of which will be separated by utilities, so one person can buy all three, or they could buy just an individual building," he said. "We have had one or two just informal offers, (saying) 'Hey, when this is done, I'll pay you this for it,' but no, we won't prepare advertisements for

## ... in the very near future'

the availability of the buildings until we get closer to the finish."

### HISTORY

The city acquired ownership of the Harper's Five and Dime and Kimbrell's stores in 2019 on the same block on East North 1st St. — and Main Street on the other side of the buildings — in downtown Seneca that many had complained had been an eyesore for years. The city paid \$115,000 for the Harper's property and agreed to drop legal action against the estate of the late Rev. Efford Haynes. Kimbrell's donated its downtown property to the city.

### DESIGN WORK 'UNDERWAY'

The city was awarded a \$10

million grant from the South Carolina General Assembly last year to turn the former Kimbrell's property into a 700-plus-seat fine arts center. That work is in the early stages.

"The money has been approved, but we certainly have not received those funds just yet," Moulder said. "We had a kickoff meeting (last month) with the entire design team that included the architect, the MEPs — mechanical, electrical and plumbing contractors. The audio and lighting engineers were in town and were part of the meeting. And design work is underway."