

Melendez, Yadira

From: Bauman, Robert
Sent: Friday, June 2, 2023 11:51 AM
To: Kendall Breunig
Cc: Ax Delessio-parson; Melendez, Yadira
Subject: Re: Recycling Facility Fire
Attachments: image002.jpg; Recycling Facility.pdf; 324 N 15th news article.pdf

Excellent points. We will put the issue on the next public works committee agenda this coming Wednesday.

Sent from my iPhone

On Jun 1, 2023, at 7:28 PM, Kendall Breunig <ken@sunsetinvestors.com> wrote:

Bob

Here is a recent article about the Recycling Facility before the fire. I am sure everyone realized years ago that this is a terrible use of land in the Menomonee Valley. But it is also a facility that no one else will want in their back yard either.

There is a lot of potential redevelopment of the land on the future extension of Mount Vernon from 13th St to the City Lights Brewery area. The city got funding for some of that. Not only that, but I have been working for 5 years to buy a building just on the North side of it that has been vacant and getting beat up at 15th & St Paul. It is 50,000sf, 4 story cream city brick and heavy timber building. I can't believe the city hasn't condemned it. During the time I have looked at it, with the vandals getting in it, they have busted pretty much every last one of nearly 300 windows in the building. And it has major environmental issues because they used to make galvanized buckets there. DNS has written them up regularly. I could solve all that if I buy it. I might have to develop it without financing because of the environmental issues. But one other problem is the Recycling Facility. If it was run properly, it would not be a problem. The last two times I was there the pile of recycling materials was 3 times the size of the building. And it blows all around the valley, including into the river. Which is what this news article is about. Redeveloping the building is difficult enough without having an out of control trash operation next to it.

I do understand it is a necessary evil to accomplish the better good of recycling. I can solve my Not in My Back Yard problem by just not redeveloping the building. That is a loss of \$6 or \$7 million of added city tax base and removal of a blighted building that has been for sale for 23 years. I had no plans to ask for a city handout. And it is a hinderance to further potential development on Mt Vernon. If the building suffered structural damage in the fire and it needs to be rebuilt, we should think about relocating it to someplace better suited. And I know that wont be easy. Otherwise, someone needs their behind kicked to operate the thing like it should be. I don't have to buy the building next to it. But people should understand that the poor operation of that facility does have impacts on the city, in investment, and on the environment with trash and runoff going into the Menomonee River. I don't want to be a complainer. Instead I hope you consider this helpful criticism.

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Recycling Facility Getting Upgrades To Keep Materials Out of River

New mural will also help beautify Menomonee Valley, highlight native wildlife.

By Clare Eigenbrode - Feb 25th, 2023 11:01 am

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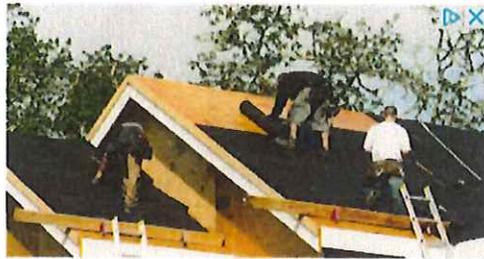


A volunteer cleanup of the Menomonee River and Materials Recovery Facility. Photo by Cheryl Nenn.

A new project aims to keep materials from Milwaukee's recycling facility from blowing into the adjacent Menomonee River. Waste in the water near the facility has drawn regulatory attention and violates the facility's contract with the city. As part of the effort, the project's organizers will also install a large mural to beautify the area and provide an additional barrier.

On a sunny afternoon in early October, a handful of volunteers in rubber gloves picked their way along the chain link fence between the river and the Materials Recovery Facility at 1401 W. Mt. Vernon Ave. They carried plastic bags they had filled with refuse from the ground along the fence and the concrete shoulder above the river: aluminum cans, flattened Amazon boxes, broken glass, Christmas cards, orphaned puzzle pieces, plastic Sendik's bags and a cross-section of other waste that Milwaukee residents had at one time tried to

recycle. A few yards away, a mound of similar debris—the source of the waste along the fence—sat almost as tall as the facility beside it.



The days of asphalt roofs are over. Here's what comes next

Erre Roof



Community members have been organizing similar cleanups at the site for several years, but this event was just one of many facets of the new project. In the months since the cleanup, the project partners have installed a mesh barrier along the length of the fence adjacent to the facility, and in April they will unveil a 15-panel mural by Milwaukee-based artist

Nova Czarnecki facing the same stretch of river.

Three nonprofit organizations, [Menomonee Valley Partners \(MVP\)](#), [Milwaukee Riverkeeper](#) and [Keep Greater Milwaukee Beautiful \(KGMB\)](#), are working on the initiative alongside the [Department of Public Works](#) and the facility's private operator, Resource Recovery Systems, on the initiative. [Waukesha County](#) and the [City of Waukesha](#) also send their recycling to the facility.

In early 2020, MVP secured a [Fund for Lake Michigan](#) grant for the initiative. The grant will also cover the cost of the barrier and mural.

"It really took a public-private project for this to move forward," **Michelle Kramer**, MVP's director of marketing and business development, told Urban Milwaukee. She added that the city had been aware there was cause to revamp that section of fencing for "years and years," but that it hadn't had the resources to do so until it was tapped by the nonprofit partners.

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The collaborators began searching for a local artist to design panels to be installed along the fence. They hoped to identify an artist experienced with painting local ecology, who could create a piece that encouraged passersby (whether they're in a kayak or walking on the [Hank Aaron State Trail](#) across the river) to consider their own impact on the environment.

When the partners spotted [Czarnecki's mural featuring native birds and fish](#) on a bridge over E. Greenfield Ave. in the [Harbor District](#), "everyone was like, 'Yes!'" Kramer said.

"Preserving nature and being a part of nature is so important to me," Czarnecki told Urban Milwaukee. "That's why I connect nature with figures [in my art]; it's part of everything." She told Kramer that she was interested in being involved with the project regardless of its budget.

Small-scale oil paintings are Czarnecki's primary medium, but her larger-than-life murals can be spotted elsewhere in the area, including on the [Mayer Building](#) in the [Historic Third Ward](#), on Sprocket Cafe on S. Kinnickinnic Ave.



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Czarnecki hopes that those who see the piece are "reminded of what it was like walking in nature as a child; how pristine things were," she said, "That naive wonderland when you're a child and you're exploring nature: the scariness of it and the beauty of it." She also hopes that a renewed appreciation for nature will push Milwaukee residents to consider what they can do to help conserve it.

The MRF is responsible for sorting, baling and shipping materials to plants where they can be converted into new products. KGMB's Executive Director **Zoe Jump** said that many buyers of recovered materials are local, and called Milwaukee-area recycling a "closed-loop system." Ideally, that system involves shipping materials out on the same day they're received, but as the volunteer cleanup crew observed firsthand back in October, that's often not the case in practice.



The days of asphalt roofs are over. Here's what comes next

Erie Roof



A major cause of waste buildup at the facility is improper recycling, including a phenomenon nicknamed "wishcycling." Plastic grocery bags, plastic sheeting, lithium batteries and scrap metal cannot currently be accepted in curbside recycling bins, but well-intentioned civilians often take a chance on placing items like these in their bins.

"Wishcycling" can cause far more harm than good said DPW sanitation services manager **Rick Meyers**. Plastic bags and plastic sheeting often become wrapped around processing machinery, and lithium batteries can cause fires inside the facility. A fire at the MRF can cause a delay of up to several months, and supply chain delays brought about by the pandemic have exacerbated interruptions at the facility.

Curbside recycling is still delivered to the facility while it's temporarily or partially inoperable and begins to build up outside of it. That buildup is the primary source of pollution along the fence. It's also susceptible to damage from the elements, which means it must be thrown away rather than recycled.



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Meyers advised Milwaukee residents to review the city's guide of recyclable materials. "Everyone should have that list hanging on their fridge," he said. "If it's not a target material that we tell you we want, then we don't want it."



✕ Milwaukee Riverkeeper's **Cheryl Nenn** said that MRF employees and managers "are doing their job, which is making sure we're recycling, but they need to prioritize cleanup as well."

Resource Recovery Systems' contract with the city requires that the area outside of the facility be kept as clean as

possible, and Nenn said that Riverkeeper has not observed the facility upholding that part of the contract. "It's been a frustrating couple of years, frankly," she said. "It's been an area of tension."

While there are no quantitative data regarding the source of the waste in that section of the Menomonee River, Kramer mentioned that the City of Milwaukee has received a citation from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources regarding contamination at the site. Nenn said that before the mesh barrier was installed, she often received photos that kayakers had taken of debris falling into the water.

Waste falling in the river "has not been a part of [the Department of Public Works's] story," Meyers said. "It's been alleged by others, but we've never been a primary witness."

He continued, "I'm proud of these partnerships, and I want to continue this kind of collaboration... I know the facility has had some challenges, and we appreciate that people are understanding that we're doing our best and have the public interest in mind."

Kramer said that MVP is "glad to be having a productive dialogue and partnership with" DPW, and that they have "the right stakeholders at the table to continue the positive momentum around the facility."

She's looking forward to unveiling Czarnecki's art to the public this spring and to MVP's other upcoming projects, including an initiative to increase tree canopy coverage throughout the Menomonee Valley.

The artwork is tentatively slated to be unveiled on Earth Day, April 22.

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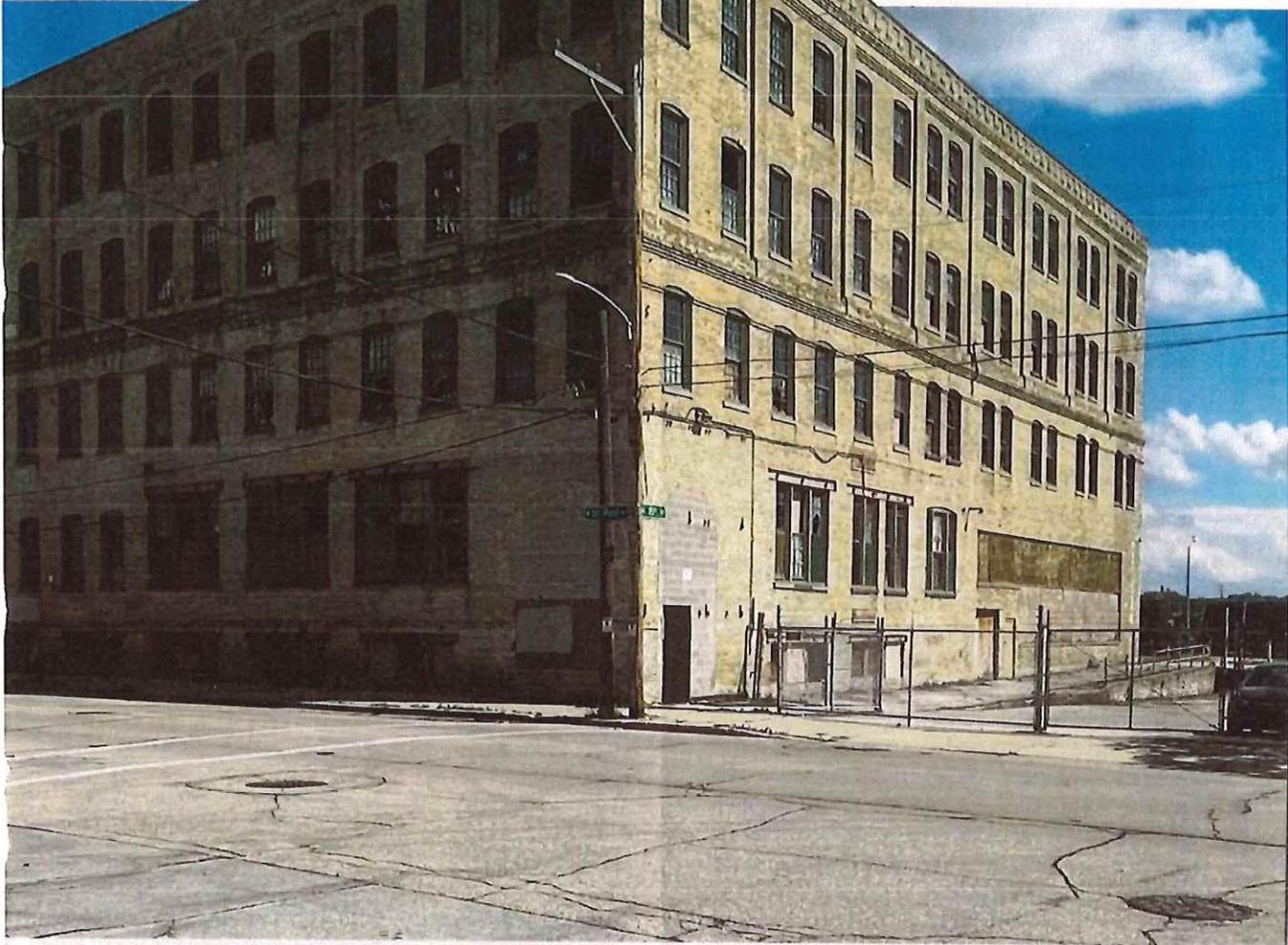
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Insider



The Lousy Neighbor

This long-idle factory, might be the best redevelopment target in the Menomonee Valley. It's also become the target of vandals.

By **RICH ROVITO**

The rebirth of Milwaukee's Menomonee Valley has been, by almost any measure, a major success. But a few dilapidated old industrial eyesores remain, none more noticeable than the vacant four-story former metalwork factory at North 15th Street and West St. Paul Avenue.

Much to the chagrin of its newcomer neighbors, the Cream City brick building has been a repeated target of vandals who have covered the lower portion of its east wall in graffiti. Many of the building's windows are shattered, missing altogether or boarded up.

The empty building, which at 324 N. 15th St. sits immediately east of the sharply renovated Third Space Brewing, "remains the biggest opportunity" in the St. Paul Avenue corridor, says Corey Zetts, executive director of Menomonee Valley Partners, the nonprofit formed in 1999 that has led the valley's redevelopment. "MVP has always believed that the four-story Cream City brick property holds so much potential," says Zetts. "We have toured it several times over the years with potential tenants but, unfortunately, no plans yet had enough traction to redevelop this property."

Across the street sits Plum Media, which has brought life to a building that once housed the offices of the Milwaukee Casket Co. “I see a lot of activity happening there that shouldn’t be. I see a lot of kids breaking in there and others that I can only suspect aren’t there to do nice things to the building,” says Plum Media President Rich Schmig. “It’s very sad. When I bought our building, that building had all new windows on all sides and now you see all of them are busted out.”

The 63,000-square foot building once housed Geuder, Paeschke & Frey Co., a manufacturer of cooking utensils and household items, according to the Wisconsin Historical Society. The company operated there in the valley’s industrial heyday, from 1890 until 1984, when General Press & Fabricating Co., a neighboring metal-stamping operation, took over the remaining operations. It’s unclear how long the building has sat vacant.

The building is owned by Readco, a holding company run by the Read family that purchased it in 2000, according to city records. Members of the family are also partners in Cream City Yards LLC, a development group that also includes Steve Looft, that bought and renovated the single-story, 12,000-square-foot building that houses Third Space.

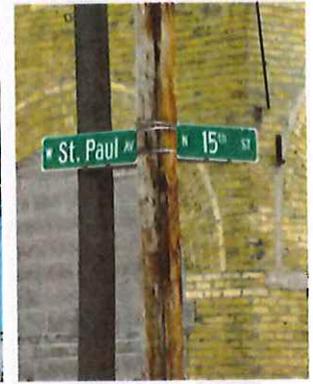
While the city has nixed residential development in the area, Looft believes the property could be transformed into a corporate headquarters office because of its proximity to Downtown and the Marquette Interchange, though demand for office space has softened since the pandemic hit. “It’s a signature landmark industrial property in a city that’s known for industry, and it’s a cool building,” Looft says during a conversation on Third Space’s expansive new patio, the vacant structure looming in the background. “This is the kind of area where you can do funky, historic renovations and do it cheap enough that you can make it work and still be close enough to an urban center.”

Looft is a developer whose partners own the troubled building; could he be the developer the building’s neighbors are looking for? “Yes and no,” Looft says of his interest. “At this point in time, it’s a big project. It’s a 60,000-square-foot historic rehab. That’s harder than new construction.”

The building has attracted young vandals who have shared their malicious mischief on social media, Looft says. He estimates that the Reads have spent \$50,000 to \$100,000 to board up windows over time, only to have vandals continue to target the property, using crowbars to break in. “It’s a real problem,” says Looft.

Multiple attempts to reach the Read family, directly and through Looft, were unsuccessful.

The situation with the vacant building deeply troubles Christopher Kidd, who co-owns the former factory of Milwaukee Casket at 422 N. 15th St. It’s now home to Kidd’s architectural firm as well as River Valley Historic Venue, a wedding and event spot operated by his wife. “One of the issues is the security and safety of our employees



“It keeps going from bad to worse. The unfortunate thing is that it doesn’t seem like anybody cares.” — CHRISTOPHER KIDD

and our guests, and that building across the street has steadily gone downhill since we purchased our building in 2017,” Kidd says. “It keeps going from bad to worse. The unfortunate thing is that it doesn’t seem like anybody cares.”

The building’s deteriorating condition has cost the venue business, Kidd says. “One of the great things about the wedding venue is that it really activates the street on the weekends,” he says. “We’ll bring in 100 or 150 guests. The challenge for us, though, is as that building has slowly been destroyed and people have been breaking in, my guests or potential clients see that, and it scares them,” he said. “They’ll ask us if the neighborhood is safe.”

Kidd responded by spending \$50,000 in December on security cameras for his property. “That’s how big of a deal it is for us,” he says.

With the building’s future uncertain at this point, concerns about its effect on other businesses in the Menomonee Valley continue to heighten.

“It’s just a matter of time until something horrific happens over there. I truly believe this,” Kidd says. “That building is affecting everybody down here.” ●