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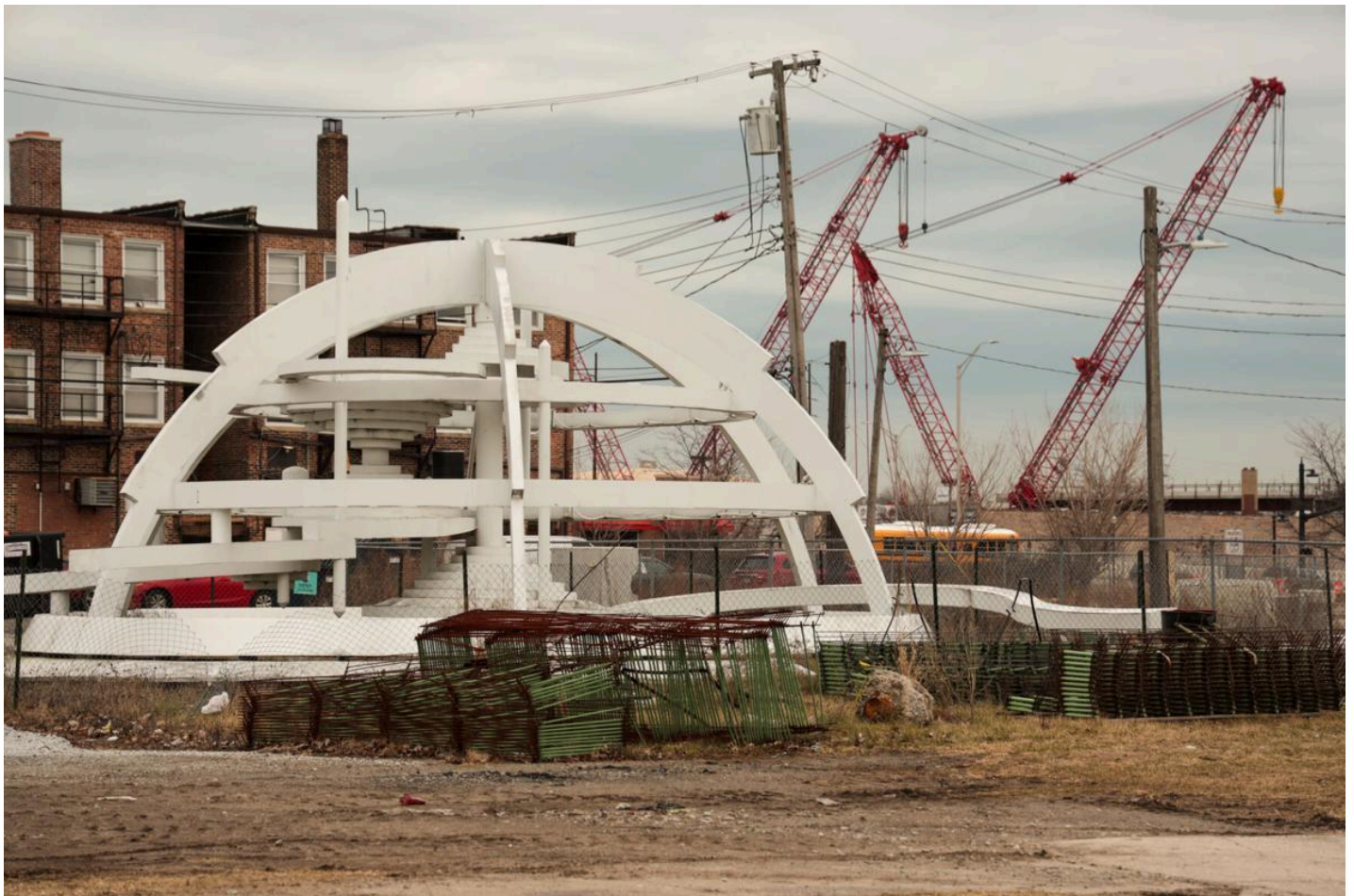
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LOOKING AHEAD | 2024

## New year will bring more transformation to downtown Hammond

**Molly DeVore**

Dec 30, 2023



The white sculpture that graced downtown Hammond has been moved out of the way of construction for the time being.

John J. Watkins



Molly DeVore

**H**AMMOND — The long-awaited transformation of downtown Hammond will begin to take shape in the new year.

For over five years, the city has been working to entirely renew the downtown — making it a place where people can shop, eat, catch some live entertainment, and even reside. While the downtown area has been under construction for over a year-and-a-half, projects will really start to fall into place throughout 2024.



Construction along Hohman Avenue continued this month in downtown Hammond.

John J. Watkins, The Times

With help from Massachusetts-based urban planner Jeff Speck, city leaders crafted a Downtown Master Plan in 2020. The plan outlined developments that would make the downtown core more pedestrian-friendly and would bring rental housing downtown.

Projects like the Rimbach realignment, the Hohman Avenue reconstruction and the rehabilitation of the historic Bank Calumet building are key elements of the downtown transformation.

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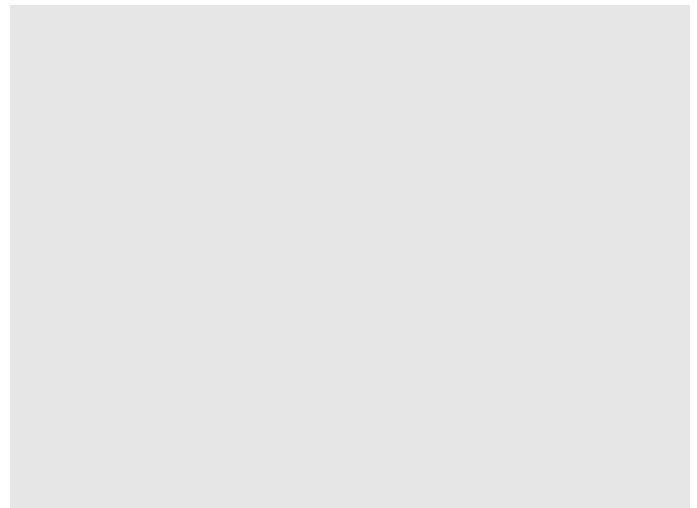
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## Making downtown the destination

"The central challenge that we're facing here is most people see it (downtown Hammond) as a place to drive through and not arrive at," Speck said in a **new documentary titled "Walkable USA."**

Though Hohman Avenue, which runs through the heart of downtown, was once lined with movie theaters, department stores and hotels. Storefronts began to empty in the 1950s as malls became more popular and the economy started to shift. Around this time, the steel mills began to decline and people started moving out to the suburbs.

With the rise of "car culture," there was less of a need for a walkable downtown and things like business parks, strip malls and suburban housing developments began popping up across the country.



However sentiments have begun to shift; in the 2020 Master Plan Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr. wrote "today's housing market shows that people want to live in downtowns, as opposed to the suburbs."

The Banc apartment complex will begin leasing units this spring, the city said.

John J. Watkins, The Times

That is why throughout the next few years over 300 housing units will be coming to Downtown Hammond.

The former Bank Calumet building will be transformed into "The Banc," a \$28 million apartment complex that will have 100 market-rate units, retail space and a 7,000-square-foot event venue. NWI Development Group, in partnership with ASA Real Estate Development and ResElevate, recently secured funding for the project. Funding came from a consortium of Peoples Bank, Horizon Bank and Centier Bank.

Anne Taylor, Hammond's executive director of Planning and Development, said units will start being leased as early as this spring; resident will begin moving in this summer. Project updates will be available at **[www.thebanchammond.com](http://www.thebanchammond.com)**.

Hammond's two other housing developments Tailor Row and Madison Lofts, have both had some delays.

"They have faced the same challenges that we're seeing across the country with construction," Taylor said rising costs and supply chain delays forced both projects to pause.

Tailor Row was initially estimated to be a \$25 million project. The 208-unit apartment complex will be located off of Hohman Ave. where the former Goldblatt's Department Store used to be. The city began to ready the site in the summer of 2022, however initial evaluations showed the foundation of some of Goldblatt's old walls and a floor slab remained on the property. The discovery delayed the project as the city had to complete additional remediation work.

Taylor said the property is currently ready for construction. While the Tailor Row project does not currently have a timeline, the hope is that construction will begin sometime in 2024.

Situated between Sibley and Rimbach Streets, the Tailor Row development will include ground-level retail and an outdoor plaza that features the city's "Rotunda Fountain" sculpture.

Construction of the Madison Lofts apartment complex, which is planned for the northeast corner of Sibley Street and Hohman Avenue, will hopefully begin this spring. Taylor said construction should take about a year. The development will be five stories and will include 55 units.

The initial cost estimate for the project was \$15 million, though Taylor said she believes the total cost may be closer to \$20 million now.

As more residents come to the downtown area, Hammond leaders want to make sure pedestrians feel as safe as possible.

For years, people have sped through the downtown without stopping. In an effort to slow traffic and increase walkability, the city has straightened the "swoop" that aligned Rimbach with Fayette Street. Taylor said the "suburban swoop" encouraged speeding.

Work is currently underway on Hohman Avenue. The city will eventually bring the road down from four lanes to just one travel lane in each direction. Hohman will be open one way going south through the winter. Come March, construction will begin on the west side of the street and in the middle. Taylor said part of downtown will be entirely closed to traffic from early spring until mid-June.

The city is creating a center median with 41 angled parking spaces; 69 street parking spaces will also be added. Phase one of the Hohman Avenue redesign will cost about \$5 million, the city is using American Rescue Act Plan funding to pay for the project.

Phase two of the redesign will begin in 2025 and will encompass the leg of Hohman Avenue that stretches from Russell Street to Douglas Street. Phase two will also involve bringing the street down from four lanes to two lanes and adding a center median with parking.

Phase two is slated to take about 12 months and cost \$4.5 million. The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, NIRPC, will contribute \$2 million and the city will contribute \$2.5 million.

With the end of the construction in site, the city is looking to bring more businesses to the downtown area. Taylor said she is currently in talks with a number of developers and local organizations.

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**PHOTOS: Construction in downtown Hammond**

## **Construction in downtown Hammond**

