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Old Vero Beach diesel plant awaits tenant

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Photo by Juan Dale Brown

VERO BEACH -- Josh Biles of Croom Construction cleans brick walls in the old diesel power plant, as seen through the plant's generator wheel.



Photo by Juan Dale Brown

VERO BEACH -- The old diesel power plant is just west of the railroad tracks on 19th Street.



Photo by Juan Dale Brown

VERO BEACH -- Croom Construction has cleaned up the old diesel power plant, and done painting and remodeling. The plant's two-story-high diesel engine is still in the building.

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VERO BEACH — Charles Croom is hoping the old diesel power plant is bustling with activity by the end of the year.

“We are in discussion with multiple tenants right now,” said Croom, vice president of Croom Construction.

The exterior renovations to the building, including new windows and refurbished bricks, are complete.

The landscaping, parking lot, and interior improvements will be done once a tenant is found for the building located immediately west of the railroad tracks and south of eastbound State Road 60.

“It’s been quite a process to say the least,” said Croom.

ABOUT THE PLANT

Old diesel power plant: The red-brick building built in phases between 1926 and 1959 served as the city’s main power supply for a number of years.

Historic designation: Placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1999. Renovations to the building have to be approved by state and federal officials.

Bricks: Recycled bricks taken from an old factory in Georgia were used to fill in openings in the building in an effort to make sure they came as close as possible to the original bricks used in the diesel plant construction. Croom said developers wanted to use brick for the back wall, but officials said it had to be constructed of a different material to reflect its past use when it could be opened up to install and service generators.

Windows: Aluminum frame windows that meet hurricane standards were installed, but were constructed to look similar to the steel frame windows that once graced the building.

Cornice: About half of the white decorative trimming had fallen away from the building. Workers used the remaining molding to determine how to shape the replacement pieces.

Roof: Croom said about eight layers of old roofing had to be removed prior to the installation of a new roof for the site. He said the ocean can be seen from the top of the new roof and one interested party talked about a possible rooftop terrace, although there is a question whether that use would be allowed.

Generator: The plant at one time contained three generators and the remaining one may be retained depending on the tenant’s desires. “Everybody who has looked at the space has fallen in love with the generator,” said Croom.

Developers: In 2001, Phil Barth, of Barth Construction Co., and Charles Block, of C.E. Block, as B/B Redevelopment Team LLC, signed a 45-year lease with the city to develop the site. They later joined with Charles Croom and David Croom, president of Croom Construction. The lease payments are based on the property value of the site, going from 3 percent to 12 percent of the property’s value over the term of the lease.

Possible tenants: Croom said the plant has generated interest from various businesses inside and outside the county. The building could house a restaurant, offices, or multiple tenants. He said a second floor could be installed in the building if desired. Lambert Commercial Real Estate, 778-2334, is handling the property.

Environmental issues: City officials spent more than \$300,000 to address several environmental hazards, such as removing lead paint, asbestos, oil sludge and contaminated groundwater from

trenches that used to contain diesel generators. The plant got a clean bill of health in 2005, but city officials said certain environmental regulations still have to be followed when it comes to issues such as installing landscaping at the site.

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