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## Centennial Park construction to start in mid-June

**Jonathan D. Epstein**

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Centennial Park and the Col. Ward Pumping Station on the Niagara River in a view from Seneca One tower.  
Derek Gee/News file photo

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**C**onstruction crews will begin mobilizing on-site for the conversion of LaSalle Park into the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Centennial Park within the next 60 days, with a goal of starting actual work by late June, a senior official with Gilbane Building Co. said Tuesday.

John K.S. Cleary, senior project executive for upstate at Gilbane and head of the firm's Buffalo office, said the initial stages of the \$110 million project will be divided into three scopes of work, targeting the new pedestrian bridge over the Niagara Thruway or I-190, the core of the park, and the shoreline.



Crews already have been taking down trees in the park to clear the way for the upcoming work. The first trees to come down have been in areas that are involved in the first phase of the project.

Gilbane, which is the construction manager for the entire project under a contract with the Buffalo Urban Development Corp., has been issuing bid packages, adjusting the scope of work, and working to identify subcontractors for the various components.

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Cleary said the firm has essentially selected a minority-owned business for the bridge work, which Gilbane hopes to have installed by July 2024.

For the core of the park – including the sledding hill, ball fields, and grading or earthwork – the company is examining bids and tweaking the plan. A women-owned business has been identified for the landscaping and earthwork, but “it’s a very active, fluid scenario for this phase,” Cleary said.

Finally, there’s the marine work that includes the shoreline and excavation, as well as resiliency efforts to protect the park behind the waterline. Experts are evaluating what material can be left and what can be reused after dredging.

“There’s a lot of technical aspects to the marine scope,” Cleary said.

Construction fencing will go up shortly around the park, which will be mostly closed during the project, after it suffered damage during the winter blizzards and ice storm. Rather than make repairs and then tearing it up again, the city decided to just close off the park because it’s not safe, Cleary said.

“As we saw with this past winter in December, we have to protect the shoreline. That is of paramount importance,” he said. “It’s one of the largest civil projects the city of Buffalo has seen, so we want to make sure we get it right.”

Separately, BUDC Executive Vice President Rebecca Gandour said that Savarino Companies has identified a potential issue with a form of radon that was found in the soil on a site that the developer wants to purchase in the Buffalo Lakeside Commerce Park.

That's not unusual for a brownfield property, she said, but the developer is working with the state Department of Environmental Conservation to determine next steps before it finalizes a purchase contract for the last 12.2 acres of available land in the South Buffalo business park.

Savarino plans to use the contiguous properties at 80, 134, 158 and 200 Ship Canal Parkway to create its own business park within the larger complex. It would use five acres to build a 45,000-square-foot retail sales, service and warehouse facility for an unnamed tenant, while reserving the remaining seven acres for a mix of build-to-suit light manufacturing, flex office, warehouse and distribution purposes.

Meanwhile, Krog Corp., which sought to buy 9.45 acres of land at 193 Ship Canal to develop for a potential tenant, has decided not to extend its exclusivity agreement with BUDC. So while the developer is "still interested," Gandour said, the agency is now working with Invest Buffalo Niagara to market the site to others.

**By Jonathan D. Epstein**

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I've been a business reporter at The Buffalo News since 2004, now covering residential and commercial real estate and development amid WNY's resurgence. I'm an upstate native, proud to call Buffalo my home, and committed to covering it thoroughly.

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