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Razing starts on future downtown tower site



Demolition began last week on the former WFSB Channel 3 building.

As downtown Hartford's planned AI Technology Center office tower moved closer with site demolition last week, the developer's efforts to obtain financing have taken a step back.

Middletown engineer Abul Islam, whose company is developing the 13-story, 170,000-square foot office tower to anchor the southeast corner of Constitution Plaza, said he is to blame for the financing delay.

In August, AI Engineers Inc. changed architects, hiring the Boston design firm that blueprinted the Hartford 21 residential tower.

That change, however, meant that until Boston architect Childs Bertman Tseckares Inc. comes up with its new design, Islam and his mortgage broker have nothing to persuade a prospective lender to finance the project.

Always the optimist, Islam said he is confident the new design for his building, which will retain the current number of floor plates and size footprint, will land financing and ultimately be a proud addition to the city's skyline.

Using a hydraulic claw, a crew from Industrial Wrecking of Bridgeport on Wednesday morning began carving away the reinforced-concrete shell of Broadcast House, a '60s-era structure that was the former studio-offices for WFSB Channel 3. The television studio has since moved to Rocky Hill.

Project Manager Dan Whittemore, of AI Engineers in Middletown, the technology center's developer, said the site at the corner of Columbus Boulevard and State Street will be cleared in 30 days.

Construction of the \$40 million tower that will serve as offices for AI and other tenants could start either late this year or early next, Whittemore said.

AI Engineers is currently interviewing prospective construction managers for the project. So far, Islam's company and several unnamed prospective tenants have spoken for about 27 percent of the building's available space, Islam said. (GREGORY SEAY)