



Waterfront Station is Now a Reality

New Mixed Use Development Opens in Southwest

BY WILLIAM RICH

After several years of planning and more than two years of construction, tenants have finally started moving into the recently completed office buildings at Waterfront Station, a mixed-use development at the Waterfront-SEU Metro. Various District government agencies, including the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, the Department of Planning, the District Department of Transportation and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer have been making the move to Waterfront Station since March. By the end of last month, about 900 employees were working in the buildings, and by early May, about 1,500 employees will be commuting to Waterfront Station.

A hallmark of the Waterfront Station development is the reopening of Fourth Street SW, which had been closed off when Waterside Mall was constructed in the 1960s. The reopened street has been designed as a “Main Street” for the neighborhood to help calm traffic in an area that will experience high pedestrian use. Bike lanes flank both sides of Fourth Street with one car lane in each direction. The road has a slight curve to it, and sidewalks are wide, with park benches lining the northern portion of the street. Work is well underway on the Metro plaza along Fourth Street SW, which will be over 30,000 square feet and will have benches, trees, fountains and lighting. Melanie Minzes, who lives north of I Street SW, is very excited about the reopening of Fourth Street SW. “It’s just fantastic to be able to walk right down Fourth Street to [get] home. Last night I was coming back from downtown, and a guard in front of one of the new buildings – very friendly – saw the big smile on my face and asked what was up.” In response, Minzes said to him, “I am so happy this is finally done! It’s awesome!”

New Safeway to Open in April

Southwesters will be in for a treat when the new urban lifestyle concept Safeway opens its doors later this month at Waterfront Station. There will be a preview party on April 15 from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., and the grand opening will occur on April 16. The new store will be 55,000 square feet, much larger than the current store’s footprint of 32,000 square feet, and is modeled after the Mount Vernon Triangle store



Fourth Street SW reopened with the completion of the Waterfront Station. Photo by Matthew Warden.

that opened in 2008. Upgrades from the old store include a Starbucks and Bergmann’s dry cleaning desk, bakery with a hearth oven, gelato station, sushi bar, seating areas around a fireplace, pharmacy, an assortment of gourmet cheeses and a floral department. In addition, wine and beer will be sold, but this section of the store will be isolated in order to help thwart underage purchasers. Eight self-check-out lanes will be available for customers, as well as five regular registers. A new store manager has been hired, and 22 out of 45 employees who have been hired so far live in the 20024 ZIP code. Parking will be validated at the new Safeway for 90 minutes in the below-grade parking garage on Fourth Street SW with a minimum purchase of \$8.

There will be an approximately nine-day gap between the time when the old Safeway closes and the new one opens. Craig Muckle, Safeway’s Eastern

Division Public Affairs and Government Relations Manager, stated the following about the store closure: “We have been fortunate that we have not had to close during the vast majority of construction. The optimum solution is to not close a store in order to construct a new replacement location, but that is not always feasible or practical. We have at least two current situations in and around the metro area where we have had to close an existing store to construct a replacement. We understand a closure of any kind is a hardship and are sensitive to those concerns, but we would not close the store early if we thought it was avoidable.” Once the old Safeway is closed, the year-long demolition process will begin.

In order to address some of the concerns about the lack of a grocery store in the neighborhood during this period, a coalition of Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 6D, Southwest Neighborhood Assembly (SWNA), the Southwest Safeway Task Force, and the Southwest Action Team (SWAT) negotiated with Safeway to offer free shuttle bus service between the Southwest Safeway and the Capitol Hill Safeway at 14th Street SE and Kentucky Avenue SE for three out of nine days that the M Street SW store will be closed. Those dates will be April 9, 10 and 12. In addition, from March 23 until April 6, some items in the old store will be sold at a 30 percent discount.

Other tenants at phase one of Waterfront Station include CVS, which will open a 12,500-square-foot store on the northern corner of the East Tower in late May or early June. A sandwich shop recently signed a lease, a burger place is close to signing a lease, as well as a 4,000-square-foot sit-down restaurant and a dry cleaners. These retailers will be located in the West Tower (the restaurant will locate in a prime spot on the south side of the building with plenty of outdoor space) and should open by late summer or early fall. Bank of America will not be moving to Waterfront Station and will vacate their trailer when their lease expires in December 2012, if not sooner, if they find another location in the area before that time. Waterfront Associates is looking for another bank to take Bank of America’s place in the development.

Parcels that will be built in later phases of development will be graded and grassed over until

financing is available and economic conditions have improved. Both of the northern parcels will eventually become housing – the northeast parcel is owned by the District government while the other is owned by Waterfront Associates. In the interim, the ANC would like the District to turn their vacant parcel into a playground. Along M Street, two vacant parcels will eventually become office buildings, and the former Environmental Protection Agency towers will be reskinned and repurposed as multifamily residential buildings.

More Openings Soon

Waterfront Station and the reopening of Fourth Street SW is one of several major improvements coming to Southwest in the next few years. In October, Arena Stage will reopen its doors after a two-year renovation and expansion as Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater. Construction has begun on a new citywide Consolidated Forensic Laboratory at the corner of Fourth and E streets SW and will open in 2012. The retail promenade at L'Enfant Plaza is under renovation, and the National Capital Planning Commission is working on a study to remake the 10th Street SW corridor as an ecodistrict. Redevelopment of the Southwest Waterfront by the Hoffman-Struever team is currently in the design phase and should start construction by 2012. In addition, Ward 6 Councilmember Tommy Wells is exploring ways to remake the M Street SW/SE corridor as a "complete street" by improving all modes of transit access, including car, bicycle, bus, pedestrian and (one day) streetcar.

For more information about Waterfront Station, visit www.waterfrontstation.com.

William Rich is a blogger at Southwest ... The Little Quadrant that Could (www.southwestquadrant.blogspot.com). ★



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