

# Genesee St Properties Get New Life

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Flynn Battaglia Architects PC  
Genesee Gateway LLC has acquired 85 and 91 Genesee St. and will incorporate them in its plans, shown in this artist's rendering.

Back in 2002, Buffalo architect Jessie Schnell Fisher stepped in to save two historic but deteriorated buildings on Genesee Street in downtown Buffalo from the wrecker's ball.

But Fisher's restoration dreams were literally "blown away" when a wind storm caused a portion of 85 Genesee St. to collapse, forcing its demolition and putting redevelopment of neighboring 91 Genesee St. in limbo.

While Fisher and her Triangle Development could not overcome the financial and structural hurdles to bring the post-Civil War structures back to life, another development group has stepped in to give them a future. Genesee Gateway LLC has acquired the two sites for \$25,000 and will incorporate them in its \$12 million vision for rebirth of the block.

- Now that we own those properties, we will get in there and see what's salvageable, said Doug Swift, a principal in City View Construction Management, the lead partner in the Genesee Gateway effort.

He said the empty triangular footprint where the building at 85 Genesee St. once stood will likely be utilized as green space. However, the remaining shell of the four-story structure of 91 Genesee St. might be salvageable.

- Our goal is to salvage as much as possible, but it's a relatively small building and it will take a significant effort to make it functional, Swift said.

The developer's immediate attention is focused on the cluster of buildings at the east end of the block -- 99 to 123 Genesee St. A contract was signed Wednesday with Depew-based Empire Building Diagnostics to perform demolition of specific interior and exterior elements of the buildings at the Oak Street end of the block.

- You should see a flurry of activity over there yet this week, or by early next week, Swift said. \_It will be a continuous effort that will move from demo to construction through roughly the next 12 months.

When completed, the string of decades-vacant structures will function as a single, 60,000-square-foot building, housing a mix of commercial uses.

- The upper floors will be office space and we'd love a restaurant, or two, for the first floor, Swift said.

The properties at the west end of the block were previously owned by Amherst businessman Willard Genrich, who gutted and braced the buildings, leaving only the facades in place. Over the years, the languishing structures, best known for the faded • Next Great Place -- billboard posted on the Oak Street exterior, became a symbol for downtown Buffalo's sluggish recovery.

In addition to City View, the Margaret L. Wendt Foundation is a key partner in the block's revival. The project recently got a boost from the Erie County Industrial Development Agency in the form of some \$435,000 in tax breaks.