

(From the New Haven Independent)

Smilow's Doors Open For A Preview

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Paul Bass Photo

Mayor John DeStefano got his first inside look at Yale-New Haven's soon-to-open cancer hospital — and proclaimed the dawn of a new era of development.

DeStefano took a hard hat tour Thursday of the \$467 million [Smilow Cancer Hospital](#) and two related new hospital-leased complexes, the 55 Park St. clinical lab and the 2 Howe St. office-apartment-retail development.

His tour guides were Yale-New Haven Hospital CEO Marna Borgstrom (pictured with DeStefano in the entrance to 55 Park) and Senior Vice-President Norman Roth. A band of architects and development officials accompanied them.

Gone was any hint of the [high-level City Hall](#)-Yale-New Haven [acrimony](#) that accompanied the approval process for these projects.

Instead, with friendly baseball banter (“They’re hitting home runs left and right” at Yankee Stadium, DeStefano noted) and questions about electronic medical records, the officials traipsed together amid work crews, up and down and along the corridors of three projects at the center of a reborn downtown. Years of debate, speculation and drawings have turned into terracotta, brick and glass. Even amid the rubble of unfinished walls and floors, it all looked real, and impressive, to the visitors.

It was the mayor's first inside look at the on-schedule projects. Yale-New Haven plans to start occupying the lower floors of the 14-story cancer hospital in late October.

Taken together, the three projects total over \$625 million in construction. They'll create an estimated 400 long-term jobs. They'll bring the city \$2.5 to \$3 million a year in combined state payments in lieu of taxes (for the Yale-New Haven-owned hospital) and direct taxes (on the privately owned 55 Park and 2 Howe, which Yale-New Haven will lease in full from Fusco Corporation and Intercontinental Real Estate, respectively).

All during a recession.



And it's just a start, DeStefano declared as the group set out on the tour.

“At a time when the national and state economy is kind of slow, this has been a huge benefit to families in southern Connecticut,” he said.

“As we're finishing this phase of work, we're pretty aggressively going to the next phase.”

The strategy: building on what makes New Haven “authentically competitive,” in the mayor's words. All this construction, including office and retail space, is spawned from a growing health care market around the hospital and medical school, he observed. Now the city's looking to expand the area. The city is negotiating with the state for the right to shut down the Route 34 Connector at Exit 3 and have developer Carter Winstanley [build a 240,000 square-foot office and lab complex](#) there.

A Gateway

The tour began at 55 Park, which from the outside has already emerged as the jewel of the new downtown. [A six-story Rubik's Cube](#) constructed hard against the Air Rights Garage, it links to the cancer hospital through an underground tunnel for deliveries from trucks in the garage, and through a fourth-story pedestrian walkway. The exterior's colors change along with the light of day.



Architect's Drawing

The tour stopped in the sunny interior space fronting Park Street. When it's done, it will serve as an open-air atrium (pictured) extended from one floor below ground all the way to the top of the fourth floor. It will offer views all the way to West Rock for visitors to the building's clinical labs and patient testing offices, and for hospital visitors passing through the building from the garage.

Architect Barry Svigals was on hand, calling the public-space atrium "the gift the hospital made" to bridge the city and the cancer hospital, both figuratively and metaphorically. He called it "the hospital's welcome mat," a "transfer point."

"You can't get the effect with all the scaffolding [there now] of how light-filled this will be," Svigals said.

Peace Out(side)



The tour proceeded through the above-ground pedestrian bridge into the 14-story cancer hospital itself. Yale-New Haven's Roth told DeStefano that once Smilow is fully operational next year, it will have 168 inpatient beds, plus four full floors for outpatient care.

He took the group to a seventh-floor "peace garden, where a pond is under construction. The hospital has planted white pine and birch trees; flowers are coming.

The garden has a two-fold purpose. One: Offering outdoor repose to patients and their families. (Electric heating pipes will help in cold weather.) Two: Contributing to the [LEED-certified](#) hospital's environmental strategy. The rooftop garden will collect rainwater, which will be reused in the building.



Back downstairs, the tour stopped at Smilow's front entrance. Outside, workers were completing a huge mast frame for a glass canopy above the three-lane driveway.



In the main lobby, DeStefano chatted up workers putting together the reception desk.