

Movement on Martin Tower (1)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Gadfly's posts, Martin Tower, Serious Issues January 29, 2019

(1st in a series on Martin Tower)

Nicole Radzievich, “Martin Tower, landmark of the Bethlehem Steel era, to be demolished. Morning Call, January 28, 2019.

The headline in the print edition is:

LEHIGH VALLEY’S TALLEST BUILDING TO BE RAZED

“Martin Tower, once Bethlehem Steel’s world headquarters, will vanish from Bethlehem’s skyline this year after a 47-year reign as the Lehigh Valley’s tallest building, a representative of its owners confirmed Monday.”

“The developers have not yet determined whether the 332-foot building will be imploded or dismantled, Duane Wagner, director of development for HRP

Management, said Monday on behalf of the owners. Wagner’s comments mark the first time the owners, a partnership of investors Lewis Ronca and Norton Herrick, have revealed

their intentions for the skyscraper since the 53-acre property, at 1170 Eighth Ave., was rezoned a little more than three years ago.”



“In a 2017 interview, Ronca said he wasn’t sure of the tower’s fate even as he began a more than \$4 million project to remove the asbestos from it and demolish surrounding ancillary buildings. ‘Over the past several years, even prior to the abatement process, we explored reuse internally and with several third-party groups, and were not able to create an economically viable plan for [its] reuse,’ Wagner said. Removing the tower opens for development the valuable property just off a Route 378 interchange. Wagner said the developers will submit a master plan for the site during the first quarter of this year.”

“Mayor Robert Donchez said the building proved over the years to be too inefficient to market. It’s better for the city as a whole, he said, to start fresh with tax-generating projects, rather than let the property continue

to languish. While some may mourn the tower's loss, Donchez said, the city can take solace in saving older symbols of Bethlehem Steel: the Steel General Offices, where famed executives Eugene Grace and Charles Schwab ruled, and the blast furnaces. 'A certain number of people feel strongly about Martin Tower, but I think there is a stronger attachment to the blast furnaces, which really has become the skyline of Bethlehem,' Donchez said."

"The Martin Tower site, in the Lehigh County portion of Bethlehem, has been eyed for redevelopment since the final tenants moved out in 2007. The property was included in the 5-year-old City Revitalization and Improvement Zone, a tax incentive that allows developers to pay off construction loans with certain state and local taxes. Demolition will prevent the use of federal tax credits developers once eyed when they successfully petitioned to get Martin Tower on the National Register of Historic Places. It was a noteworthy application because the building was younger than 50, yet preservationists agreed its ties to mighty Bethlehem Steel made it noteworthy."

"In 2006, Martin Tower landed in the hands of the company that now includes Ronca and Herrick. There was little demand for the tower's 600,000 square feet of office space. Its size and shape were unattractive to investors and its mechanical system was outdated. It was difficult to find a single occupant to fill the building, and its layout was inefficient.

Developers had first envisioned a \$200 million residential community, but that faded when the residential market took a downturn. Those plans were shelved after the housing crash. The property lingered until 2015, when city zoning was changed to make it easier for Martin Tower to be demolished and allowed a mix of office, commercial and residential development."