

Sherwin-Williams' pick of new Cleveland HQ site stirs talk of more activity downtown

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Pedestrians pass the Landmark Office Towers, the longtime home of the Sherwin-Williams Co., on Thursday, the day the Fortune 500 employer announced it will build a new headquarters complex a few blocks away on Public Square. [The Plain Dealer](#)

By [Michelle Jarboe, The Plain Dealer](#)

CLEVELAND, Ohio – The [Sherwin-Williams Co.'s announcement](#) Thursday that it will, indeed, [build its new headquarters](#) on parking lots just west of Public Square prompted cheers from advocates for a better, brighter downtown; set real estate investors abuzz; and started to unclog a pipeline of business dealings that slowed or stalled while Northeast Ohio waited to see where the global paint giant and thousands of its employees would land.

The headquarters deal, and Sherwin-Williams' [related plans to build a new research and development center in Brecksville](#), isn't done. The projects hinge on a state-and-local incentive package that, [for the most part](#), still has not been unveiled publicly. Those incentives, likely tied to jobs and investments in real estate, will require public hearings over the next few months.

If local governments sign off, site preparations for the Sherwin-Williams projects – in which the company expects to invest at least \$600 million – could start as soon as this summer. Workers wouldn't move into the new buildings until 2023, at the earliest.

Sherwin-Williams hasn't released any images of office towers or research facilities.

But planners and civic advocates already are imagining a downtown without a decades-old ocean of asphalt – what one onlooker called “the most glaring, continuous piece of pavement” in the center city – at its core.

“If there were ever shovel-ready properties in our central business district, those are the three,” said Tony Coyne, an attorney who served on the [Cleveland City Planning Commission](#) for 25 years, most of that time as its chairman, and who chairs the [Group Plan Commission](#), which is focused on a handful of key public spaces downtown. “When you look at the square from the air, or walk around the perimeter, it’s the only undeveloped piece of property.”

He characterized Sherwin-Williams’ decision to locate on Public Square’s doorstep as a validation of public and private investments to [remake the space](#) a few years ago. A Fortune 500 headquarters deal, he added, should be viewed as cause for additional investments in fixing up and maintaining that central downtown park and gathering place.

Many of the buildings near the square have been [sold](#), [burnished](#) or [restored](#) in recent years, but developers have been eyeing the 55 Public Square office building, [in desperate need of renovations](#) and a parking-garage overhaul, and the early-1900s [Rockefeller Building](#), office space that might make more sense as housing at Superior Avenue and West Sixth Street.

Real estate investors already are looking at additional sites for residential projects on the periphery of the nearly 7-acre property that Sherwin-Williams has tied up, stretching north of Superior on both sides of West Third Street.

And labor unions already are cheering the prospect of an estimated 7,000 construction jobs between the 1 million-square-foot headquarters and the 500,000-square-foot R&D hub.

“This is really, really good news for us,” said David Wondolowski, executive secretary and business manager for the [Cleveland Building and Construction Trades Council](#), an umbrella organization for unions that represent more than 10,000 members. “I want to personally applaud the city and the county for their efforts to retain this employer, because without their help, there was a good chance we could have lost them.”

Organizations that participated in talks with Sherwin-Williams over the past six months have remained extremely tight-lipped, referring most questions to the company. In response to interview requests, for example, the [Downtown Cleveland Alliance](#) simply emailed a prepared statement, saying that the headquarters “will have a tremendous economic impact that will increase downtown Cleveland’s vibrancy and accelerate our momentum.”

Joe Roman, president and chief executive officer of the [Greater Cleveland Partnership](#), wouldn’t discuss details of the Sherwin-Williams deals. But he described the headquarters as a project that not only will fill a physical void downtown but also will heal psychological wounds left by past corporate departures and unrealized development plans.

“I think it’s an anchor. I think it’s an engine. I think it’s a symbol,” he said, adding “We need to make sure that the project happens on time, on budget and in the most proud way.”

Before Thursday’s announcement, there seemed to be near-universal consensus in real estate circles that Sherwin-Williams would put its headquarters on the downtown parking lots, just a short walk from the company’s longtime offices in the Landmark

Office Towers at Tower City. But the future of the company's research operations, including its main R&D center along the Cuyahoga River behind Tower City, remained a subject of speculation.

Until [late Wednesday](#), downtown landlord Doug Price believed Sherwin-Williams would choose to consolidate its research and development facilities behind Tower City, on properties owned by companies affiliated with Detroit-area billionaire and Cleveland Cavaliers owner Dan Gilbert. That would have been a boon to Price, whose [K&D Group](#) owns Terminal Tower and the nearby [Post Office Plaza](#) office building, and a boost to the long-ailing mall at Tower City, which also belongs to Gilbert's family of companies. Now that Sherwin-Williams has made its intentions clear, Price is agitating for [Bedrock](#), the mall's Detroit-based landlord, to forge ahead on a [redevelopment project](#).

"This will kick off, now, the next wave of development," he said on Thursday evening, after a day filled with phone calls and emails spurred by the headquarters announcement. "This was a great day for Cleveland. Not a perfect day. But a great day."



The existing Sherwin-Williams headquarters property, which the company has called home for 90 years and has owned since 1985, is part of the broader Tower City complex perched above the Cuyahoga River. The Plain Dealer

Bedrock executives couldn't be reached for comment Friday. The company is [renovating](#) the landmark May Co. department store building on Public Square with apartments and parking but has not started construction to reposition the mall or to build on neighboring land.

Sherwin-Williams' looming move raises questions about yet another asset at Tower City, where the company has occupied the Landmark Office Towers for 90 years and has owned the trio of interconnected buildings since 1985. The paint maker said it hasn't made any decisions about its real estate, which also includes the 10-acre Breen Technology Center property in the Flats and [a large R&D center in Warrensville Heights, off Warrensville Center Road](#).

[Jonathan Sandvick](#), a Cleveland architect and historic-preservation expert, said it would make sense to put housing and a hotel, along with some office space, in the 18-story Landmark Office Towers complex on Prospect Avenue. The buildings span more than 1

million square feet and would make for a challenging – and costly – undertaking, one that developers compared to the mammoth [925 Building](#) that’s earmarked for a makeover but still sitting empty at East Ninth Street and Euclid Avenue.

Based on Sherwin-Williams’ timeline, though, it will be at least three years until those buildings go dark. During a brief news conference Thursday at Cleveland City Hall, Mayor Frank Jackson said his administration talked about the fate of the existing headquarters and the research center on the river early on but has been primarily focused on keeping Sherwin-Williams here.

“Now,” Jackson said, “we’ll move to that to see what would be the highest and best use. ... It’s a major piece of our waterfront.”

