

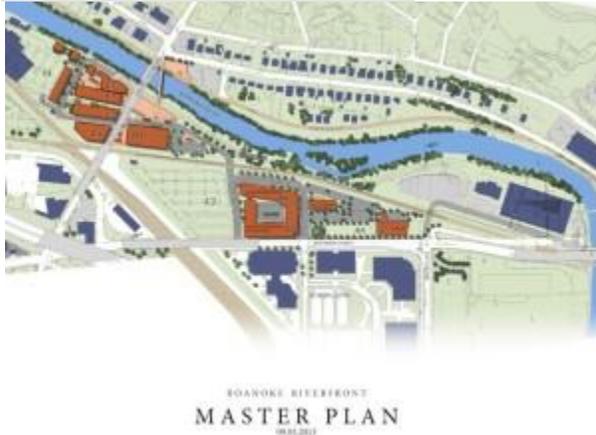
Riverfront project rising in Roanoke

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The Roanoke Riverfront project will use 22 acres near the Roanoke River. (image courtesy Bridge/Ewert)

The developers who brought Belmont Bay to Woodbridge and both Rocketts Landing and The Locks to Richmond now have launched the first stages of a riverfront project in Roanoke.

The mixed-use construction officially known as The Bridges will be built on 22 acres that sit between the Roanoke River and the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and Research Institute.

The Bridges is the latest project from Jason Vickers-Smith and Richard Souter of Richmond's WVS Companies. They're working with architect Burrell Saunders, a frequent collaborator who has designed town centers up and down the East Coast, including in Virginia Beach, Newport News and Norfolk.

General contractor THOR Construction has broken ground on the site and is working on two buildings: A historic warehouse that will be renovated for a coffee house and an as-yet-unnamed restaurant, and an apartment building that will include 96 one-bedroom units, 53 two-bedroom units and 8 three-bedroom units, said project manager Aaron Ewert. Roughly \$13 million will be invested into this first phase of construction.



The first phase of The Bridges is underway.

The Bridges was made possible in large part by a 110-acre, city-managed redevelopment project that includes the project site. The city of Roanoke bought, traded and even used eminent domain to acquire property in former industrial district and open the way for a new wave of development that also involves Carilion Clinic, Virginia Tech and Cambria Suites.

Ewert said the growing medical school, which in its fourth academic year has reached student capacity, is a likely source of residents for The Bridges, as are the doctors and medical personnel who work at the nearby Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital or at the numerous medical practices located nearby.

"The apartments should be moving in the first wing by next August, in time for the school year," Ewert said. "We're convinced we'll rent some apartments out to the medical crew in this area, but it's open for anyone who wants to be down near the river. It's the live/work/play idea."

The developers intend to build a railroad crossing for the next phase of the project, which will include a brewery and recreational amenities such as a river walk and kayak launch on the Roanoke River. Ewert projects the eventual build-out value at \$150 million.

"If we're successful and have good absorption, we'll keep building," Ewert said.

The city is banking the new development will not only act as a destination, but also a driver for nearby development. Last year the city council formally extended the boundaries of the downtown district to include The Bridges and surrounding land with the hopes of attracting infill development on the mile-long stretch of Jefferson Street that links it with the city core.