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Case's Tire Co. makes way for Lafayette College theater, film facility
A new building will anchor the private college's arts campus at the foot of College Hill.



Lafayette College plans to demolish Case's Tires on N. Third Street in Easton to make way for a new film and media facility. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO, THE MORNING CALL / December 13, 2012)

By JD Malone, Of The Morning Call
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The Rough Dry Laundry must feel left out, or a little nervous. The red-brick relic may soon be the last remnant of Easton's industrial corridor tucked between Route 22 and the Bushkill Creek at the foot of College Hill.

Lafayette College, which owns most of the properties at N. Third and Snyder streets, plans to demolish the Case's Tire Co. building and replace it with a new facility featuring a big red box jutting toward the intersection.

Case's Tire Co. will join the Hubcap and Wheel Store, which was torn down in 2010, in the city's collective memory sometime in the next year or so, according to Mary Wilford-Hunt, director of facilities planning and construction at Lafayette.

The building is a two-story, Art Deco-style shop built in 1950, according to tax records. Lafayette purchased the building in 2001 for \$850,000. The tire shop opened in 1909. The college plans to replace it with the new home for its theater, film and media studies school, complete with a black-box theater, movie-screening room and classrooms.

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Wilford-Hunt said there was no way to save the building and serve Lafayette's students.

"Trying to shoehorn performance arts spaces into a tire store is not easy," she said. "We would have to make a lot of design compromises."

City officials did not bemoan the loss.

"It is not a high-style example of Art Deco architecture," city Planning Director Becky Bradley said.

Bradley applauded the college's effort to transform a gritty pocket of the city into what may become its grandest gateway. The N. Third Street corridor is one of the busiest in the city as motorists exit and enter Route 22, head downtown, or climb up College Hill.

"That part of the city has been underutilized for a long time," Bradley said. "And it hasn't looked that good in a long time."

The college embarked on a buying spree a decade ago, snapping up more than two dozen properties at the foot of the hill, beneath the gaze of the statue of the Marquis de Lafayette outside the campus' Colton Chapel.

Wilford-Hunt said Club Mohican, across the street from Case's Tire, will be renovated for media studies and receive studios, classrooms and faculty offices.

She said there are no plans, as of yet, for the Rough Dry Laundry, which the college uses for storage.

The city's Historic District Commission approved Lafayette's plans at a meeting Monday night, even as commission members questioned the ultra-modern look of the new building, Bradley said. Wilford-Hunt said the design is not complete and won't be for months. She added that demolition won't begin until the design is final.

Bradley said the tire shop suffers from various structural problems and it is in the 100-year flood plain. Wilford-Hunt said the new building will be elevated above the 100-year flood plain.

Mayor Sal Panto Jr. gave full support to the college's development plans, and the building design.

"Wait until you see it," Panto said. "It's a wow factor for the entrance to our city."

Bradley said the city appreciates that the college chose to expand in the industrial pocket, instead of scooping up more residential area adjacent to its College Hill campus. She said reusing defunct buildings and vacant plots injects energy into what was an overlooked bunch of eyesores.

"They are looking at it in a new and fun way," Bradley said. "They are really chipping away to make that a more vibrant space."

Other projects planned at the college include a new welcome center, renovations to the Kirby Sports Center and a center for global education that will house several departments.

jdmalone@mcall.com