

High-speed rail continues to gobble up Fresno buildings

Tim Sheehan, Fresno Bee, 8-25-15

Two more buildings in downtown Fresno are coming down this week as crews continue to clear a path for California's high-speed rail project.

The steel teeth of an excavator started tearing into the former Paper Plus building on G Street between Fresno and Merced streets on Monday morning. On Tuesday, workers plan to begin knocking down the concrete block building next door, the former home of low-income solar installer GRID Alternatives, said Elizabeth Jonasson, a spokeswoman for the California High-Speed Rail Authority.

Both buildings were built in 1981 on lots that are about one-third of an acre in size. The Paper Plus building at 1266 G St. occupied about 6,000 square feet of its lot, while the GRID Alternatives warehouse took up about 7,380 square feet on its lot. Both properties were sold by the Emerian family to the rail authority last year.

Earlier this year, the rail authority made the concrete-block GRID Alternatives building available for the Fresno Police Department's SWAT unit for training.

The buildings will be the latest in downtown Fresno to be demolished to make way for the high-speed train tracks that are planned to ultimately course through Fresno and the San Joaquin Valley en route from San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Eleven months ago, work began to tear down the vast and vacant Del Monte building on the east side of G Street between Tulare and Kern streets. Since that time, other buildings along G Street have come down: from a pair of office buildings on both the north and south side of Divisadero Street formerly used by the state Department of Corrections; trucking company White Bear Transportation south of Divisadero; J&J Cafe on the northwest corner of Tulare and G streets; the former Baz Brothers building on G south of Kern Street; the former ATC Distributing building at the northeast corner of G and Mono streets; and the Beacon gasoline station on the northwest corner of Ventura and G streets.

The most recent casualty, about a month ago, was the former Kerr Rug Co. building at the southwest corner of Ventura and G streets. That building was torn down for a new Ventura Street underpass that will carry traffic under the new bullet-train tracks as well as the existing Union Pacific Railroad freight tracks.

J. Kroeker Inc. of Fresno is the demolition subcontractor for Tutor Perini / Zachry / Parsons, the prime contractor for the first 29-mile construction section – from American Avenue south of Fresno to Avenue 17 at the northeast edge of Madera – on the statewide project. Another subcontractor, Fresno-based Katch Environmental, is handling the removal of asbestos and other hazardous materials from buildings being demolished along the route.

Not included in the Tutor Perini / Zachry / Parsons contract is a 2-mile stretch between Ashlan and Clinton avenues in central Fresno, where Caltrans will be moving Highway 99 to the west by about 100 feet to make room for the high-speed rail tracks. A different contractor is handling demolition of buildings in that area, including the longtime landmark Astro Motel that no longer stands.