NEWS

"Slow down, you crazy child / You're so ambitious for a juvenile."
VIENNA BILLY JOEL

Union Station interior upgrades announced for 2028 completion

BY NELLIE KENNEY & TAJRIAN KHAN
STAFF REPORTERS



NELLIE KENNEY / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
State and city leaders announced renovation work worth $24.8 million, including building new restrooms and retail spaces, at a Monday press conference. Months ago, they launched plans for major upgrades to the station's platforms and tunnels.

Union Station will get renovated restrooms and retail spaces along with a new central atrium and exterior repairs as part of a $24.8 million state-funded renovation.

State and city leaders gathered on Monday to announce the renovation, which they described as a pathway to economic growth for the city and a step toward making New Haven a major hub for regional transit.

"Union Station will be transformed into a top-tier transit hub destination that New Haven residents and Connecticut riders can enjoy," Mayor Justin Elicker said at Monday's press conference.

Connecticut Transportation Commissioner Garrett Eucalitto said at the press conference that the first phase of internal construction will involve building new restrooms and renovating the station's second floor. Work on those features will likely begin in the next month or two, he said.

Officials expect interior work to finish in the second half of 2028 and parking garage repairs to conclude in the second half of 2029.

Construction will not cause interruptions to train service, Eucalitto said.

Gov. Ned Lamont SOM '80, Lieutenant Gov. Susan Bysiewicz '83 and State Senate President Pro Tempore Martin Looney also spoke at the event.

Exterior repairs to the station and parking garage are set to cost $9.1 million and have been underway since April. Interior renovations are expected to total $15.7 million, according to a Monday press release by the governor's office. New Haven is partnering with the Connecticut Department of Transportation to advance the construction.

The new renovation plans come after officials presented a roadmap for $402 million in upgrades to the station's platforms and tunnels in April and $113 million in capital investments for the nearby State Street Station.

"New Haven Union Station is an important link in Connecticut's transportation network, and we are focused on making it a world-class transit facility," Eucalitto said in Monday's press release.

Looney, who has represented the eastern half of New Haven in the state senate for over three decades, said the rails played a major role in New Haven's development as a city during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The population of New Haven increased from around 40,000 in 1860 to nearly 110,000 in 1900, per records kept by the Connecticut Secretary of State's Office. The "key" to that growth, Looney said, was rail transportation.

The current project will be a "renewal and renaissance" for the city as a transportation hub, Looney said.

In his speech, Elicker painted a picture of economic growth in New Haven and touted the city's increasing population, which he suggested would provide a larger clientele for future businesses operating in the station.

The plans for the station would accommodate 13 retail spaces, Bysiewicz said. These may include restaurants, cafes and shops. Vendors interested in the spaces can apply until the end of January.

The city also plans to build as many as 2,500 new housing units across from the station, Elicker said. New Haven recently failed to win a $26 million federal grant to support construction near the station but plans to go ahead with its first phase.

Elicker said he hopes the restaurants and shops in the station will be a "real resource" for people living in nearby units and other city residents, in addition to travelers.

In a speech closing out the press conference, Lamont said updates to the station are "the start of something much bigger for this transportation hub."

Ward 6 Alder Carmen Rodriguez, whose ward includes Union Station, said in an interview after the press conference that the constituents she had spoken to were "excited" about the renovation, and particularly the new retail spaces.

The current Union Station building was designed by Cass Gilbert and built in 1920.

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Wooster Square farmers market widens access to fresh produce

BY ELSPETH YEH
STAFF REPORTER

The parking lot beside the Conte West Hills Magnet School comes to life on early Saturday mornings with the Wooster Square Farmers Market.

Last Saturday, the lot was filled with families and residents walking their dogs and strangers lapsing into easy conversation. A saxophone player added to the ambiance.

The market, one of the busiest in Connecticut, has been serving New Haven residents since 2004 and is managed by CitySeed, a food equity nonprofit that seeks to promote healthy food networks in the New Haven area. Despite attacks on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program programs by the Trump administration, the market continues to provide food for the community.

"A lot of hunger relief organizations have a lot of processed food, have a lot of shelf-stable food," CitySeed's Executive Director and Ward 14 Alder Sarah Miller said in a phone interview. "Our piece of it is to try to do whatever we can to make sure that there's as much fresh and local, nutrient-dense produce in the mix for folks experiencing food insecurity as possible."

Wooster Square Farmers Market was the first market in Connecticut to begin accepting SNAP benefits. Today, all SNAP redemptions at CitySeed markets are worth double their typical value. CitySeed also partners with the state to continue a version of the Local Food Purchasing Assistance program, which was eliminated by the federal government last September.

Government cuts have never deterred CitySeed. Last fall, when SNAP payments were temporarily suspended by the Trump administration, the organization raised money to allow SNAP card holders to use tokens to purchase food at the market, Miller said.

Allison-Ping Benguiat, the farmers market manager for CitySeed, said in an interview that all produce at the Wooster Square Farmers Market is sourced from independent Connecticut farms. Additionally, processed food vendors are required to use at least one ingredient from a Connecticut farm.

Daren Hall runs George Hall Farm, a family farm in Simsbury, Connecticut, that specializes in organic vegetables. Hall has been selling produce at the Wooster Square Farmers Market for over two decades, since its second year of operation.

Hall said the market has changed a lot over the years, but he keeps up the hour-long commute for the community he found at Wooster Square.

"There was a huge support group down here. I didn't realize that New Haven was full of foodies," Hall said. "In the early days, who knew that the Yale students would come to the farmer's market? And then the professors started coming, and then pretty soon there was a lot of influx from the school coming down here."

Lately, though, the market has only seen an uptick in Yale patrons at the beginning and end of the academic year, according to Hall.

Ruth Baxter, the cheesemaker for Beaver Brook Farm, said coming to Wooster Square Farmers Market is her "favorite day of the week." The farm, owned and operated by the Sankow family in Lyme, Connecticut, for over a century, was once one of the largest sheep farms in Connecticut.

"We have to maintain a balance between different types of vendors so that the market is successful for everybody who's there," Miller said, describing how the market chooses vendors.

Miller said another goal of CitySeed's market is to support aspiring business owners who have not yet been able to open a store front. One of Wooster Square's vendors, Meakai Thai, is a project owned by a Yale Hospitality employee who works at Commons.

Beyond the organization's mission of "Good Food for All," Benguiat, the farmers market manager, said she hopes that the market serves as a "third space" for New Haven residents — "not just a place where people buy food and talk to some of the vendors, but also, really, where you come to hang out and you have a good time."

"We come every Saturday," said Adam Peters, who lives down the street from the farmers market. "There's a lot of small businesses and whatnot selling stuff here. And they have a lot of high quality stuff."

"It's always been really wonderful. There's never any weird people or bizarre vibes," said Cameron Stockford, another Wooster Square resident.

Benguiat said she hopes that even as the weather gets cooler, New Haven residents will continue to visit the Wooster Square Farmers Market, which moves indoors after Nov. 21.

"I mean, when do you get to actually chat with a farmer?" she said. "It's a great opportunity just to hang out, grab some stuff, and just learn more."

In Connecticut, 77 percent of farms are owned by families or individuals.

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ELSPETH YEH / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
In the wake of federal funding cuts for public nutrition benefit programs, CitySeed works to bring local farms and food vendors to Elm City residents at the Wooster Square Farmers Market, held every Saturday morning.