

Former Winona hospital soon to see wrecking ball

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INDIANAPOLIS - An abandoned hospital on the near north side is finally set for demolition.

Winona Hospital has been boarded up since it abruptly closed in 2004. Doctors saved countless patients while the hospital was in operation for nearly 50 years, but since they abandoned the building seven years ago this week, it has been dying a slow death.

Squatters have made it worse.

"It has been heavily vandalized and has been subject to the environmental issues over the course of seven years, so we are working to clean up all that debris," said Nivas Vijay, Heartland Environmental Services.

The tons of debris include big things like water heaters and hospital beds and smaller items like television sets and flower vases.

"Lots of medical equipment. Hospital beds, TVs, computer screens, medical records, things of that nature, are strewn throughout the facility," said Vijay.

Then there is the building itself. It was built in the late 1950s with fiberglass insulation. Leaking water has brought mold to add to the environmental danger. Medical technicians left biological waste behind, too, and even patient records.

There is so much that it can't be buried and forgotten. All of the waste has to be carried away and disposed of properly.

"We're using wet demolition processes, so there are going to be dust mitigation controls in place, so there should not be any neighborhood concerns," Vijay said.

The large amount of waste is also part of the reason explosives experts can't implode the building. The other is the sprawling size.

"This site is 600,000 square feet, approximately, over roughly four acres, so implosion is not the proper methodology to do this," Vijay said.

Workers will dismantle the building piece-by-piece starting October 10, a job that is likely to take until the end of the year. Workers will crush the concrete and cinder block used to build the building and use it for backfill in the old hospital's basement.

The city accepted the lowest of nine bids to demolish the building, for just under \$700,000. Crews say some of the metal from the 55-year-old building can be salvaged, but the building itself is beyond repair.

There is also a large fuel storage tank underground on the property, so it is unclear if further environmental clean up will be needed. So far, there is no word on how long it will take to get the area ready for new construction.

The city would like to use the area for housing, retail, and green space. City officials say they have a vested interest in the site and they are ready for new businesses to come to the area.

