



ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

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ROBERT COHEN PHOTOS, POST-DISPATCH

The pedestrian bridge connecting the Railway Exchange building to its parking garage is slowly being demolished on Friday, Jan. 24, in downtown St. Louis. Olive Street between Sixth and Seventh streets was closed during the work.

Pressure prompts boost to Railway Exchange security

City Hall, lender push for action at troubled downtown building

BY STEPH KUKULJAN
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

ST. LOUIS — The owner of the troubled Railway Exchange Building, a centerpiece of downtown St. Louis architecture, is moving to shore up security after a series of break-ins, including one that led to the death of a fire department search-and-rescue dog earlier this month.

The owner of a security company that patrolled the building said the situation had become nearly untenable: Thieves were stealing copper, drug use in the building was commonplace, and criminal suspects were hiding inside. Amos Harris, a representative of owner Hudson Holdings of Florida, said the company was under pressure from City Hall and its lender to beef up security.

“The illegal salvage crews would break in and that would become an entrance for the homeless,” Harris said in a text.



Kenneth Knackstedt, center, owner of Citizen's Guard Security, talks with a St. Louis police sergeant working a secondary security job, after being told that his firm was fired from securing the Railway Exchange building on Friday, Jan. 24, in downtown St. Louis. Knackstedt, who said he had a contract and could not be fired without 30 days notice, remained on the scene as new efforts to secure the building were underway.

“Stopping this required substantially more funding and the lender turned to Hudson, the owner, to fund these costs.”

City Hall and historic preservationists both agree that the Railway Exchange Building, at 615 Olive Street, is a jewel worth

saving — but it's been years since the vacant, 21-story, 1.2 million-square-foot building that occupies an entire block has shined. Its continued deterioration threatens not just the viability of the historic property but the lives of those inside the building.

Built in 1914, it served as the headquarters of Famous-Barr parent May Department Stores before Macy's acquired the company in 2005. Thousands shopped there every year, and generations of St. Louisans had admired the retailer's extensive tinselled model train displays during the winter holidays before Macy's left. The property has sat vacant for nearly a decade.

Harris had for years managed the property for Hudson, more recently renamed as Triple Double Real Estate. Harris quit in mid-December after not being paid. Triple Double's ownership group, led by Andrew “Avi” Greenbaum, rehired Harris after city officials condemned the building in January.

Security officers were at the property Friday morning as city crews worked to demolish the pedestrian bridge connecting the Railway Exchange with its nearby parking garage.

Nick Desideri, a spokesperson for Mayor Tishaura O. Jones, said the owner will be billed for the

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Voters could OK sweeping review of City Hall

Proposition C would create a special panel to review city charter

BY AUSTIN HUGUELET
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

ST. LOUIS — Election Day is less than two weeks out, and much of the attention is focused on the races that will form the next Board of Aldermen. But the most important contest may be elsewhere on the ballot.

Proposition C asks poll-goers to authorize a special panel to review the city's century-old charter, which lays out the ground rules for city government, and propose changes to voters next year.

And those changes could be big. The charter shapes virtually everything that happens at City Hall, from how tax dollars get spent to who gets hired to what gets built. And while the commission could spend its allotted year updating old language, like the male pronouns used to describe the mayor's responsibilities, it could also take on hot-button issues: hiring rules derided by some as painfully inefficient, the number of elected officials, or even the city's weak-mayor government, which, for instance, requires multiple bodies to approve the annual budget.

“It could change a great deal of the way St. Louis is governed, depending on how far they take it,” said Lana Stein, a longtime political scientist at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

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Netanyahu's touch eludes him as Israel chaos spirals

BY STEVE HENDRIX
The Washington Post

JERUSALEM — Few figures have stood astride the Israeli public arena like Benjamin Netanyahu, the longest-serving prime minister in the country's history.

Over a record six terms, the leader known as “Bibi” has honed an image that is more puppet-master than politician, so often has he eluded scandal, bounced back from defeat and outwitted opponents (and more than a few allies).

But his government's move to overhaul the judicial system has created a paralyzing political crisis — setting off mass protests, sending the currency plummeting and sparking warnings of “civil war” from Israel's president.

On Sunday, the chaos began to corrode his own government. Netanyahu fired his defense

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Organizers of tournament praise safety precautions

Volleyball tourney is back after player hurt in a downtown crash

BY NASSIM BENCHAAABANE
AND JACOB BARKER
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

ST. LOUIS — Organizers of a major girls' volleyball tournament in downtown St. Louis said the weekend passed without problem, thanks in large part to extra safety measures that included shutting a major thoroughfare to cross-traffic.

“It was a good weekend,” Capitol Sports owner Scott McQueen said Sunday at America's Center, which echoed with the thuds of volleyball hits from the tournament's last games on exhibit floors transformed into 75 volleyball courts for about 20,000

young women players and their families.

And he hopes for a similar success this weekend, when up to 15,000 volleyball players and their supporters return for the second leg of Capitol Sports' Mideast Qualifier tournament, he said.

The qualifiers are Capitol Sports' first major tournament here since its Presidents Day tournament last month was marred by a high-profile traffic crash that severely injured visiting volleyball player Janae Edmondson, 17, while she walked along a downtown street with her family.

The crash touched off a political firestorm in St. Louis and the Missouri Capitol over public safety. Critics accused St. Louis

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CHRISTIAN GOODEN, POST-DISPATCH

Pedestrians enter a safety barrier on the westbound side of Washington Avenue at America's Center on Saturday under a stepped-up plan to protect people attending Capitol Sports' volleyball tournament. The enhanced safety is a response to the Feb. 18 traffic crash in which visiting volleyball player Janae Edmondson was seriously injured as she and her family walked along a downtown street.

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