

# R.I. State Health Lab construction gets fully underway. This time, for real.

By Brian Amaral Globe Staff, Updated August 16, 2023, 8:00 a.m.

*While working with project architect, HOK, Vanderweil is providing MEP/FP engineering services for the new State Health Laboratory Building.*



PROVIDENCE — A mere 10 months after the politicians' ceremonial groundbreaking, actual work has begun in earnest at the future state health laboratory.

The empty lot on Richmond and Clifford streets has sat without much substantial activity since Governor Dan McKee and other local luminaries wielded shovels to turn over a few pounds of imported dirt in October to celebrate the project, which will also have private lab space. But on Tuesday, an excavator took up the cause from the politicians' hands, digging various holes and removing various asphalt.

Some prep work had taken place on the site, which is on former 195 land. And earlier in the summer a fence went up in preparation for even more. Now it's really getting going — or as the developer put it, the "full launch of construction" has commenced as of Wednesday.

"The State of Rhode Island was visionary in establishing the goal of bringing the state health lab together with private lab space in one building, to help nurture the local life science industry as part of the revitalization of this area," Josh Parker, the CEO of developer Ancora L&G, said in a news release. "This investment exemplifies our focus on collaboration and creating lasting partnerships with higher education and healthcare providers, local businesses, and people."

According to the state, Ancora recently closed on the land acquisition with the I-195 Redevelopment District Commission. Asked about delays, Department of Administration spokeswoman Laura Hart said the state had expected construction to start in the

spring of 2023 after the groundbreaking ceremony in October.

"Given recent cost escalations in the construction industry, the state chose to require stringent financial safeguards for the project, among them a letter of credit that Ancora has recently secured," Hart said.

The project, when it's eventually built, will have about 120,000 square feet for commercial and institutional users and another 80,000 square feet of space for the state Department of Health laboratory. Brown University has signed a letter of intent to anchor the private lab space, according to Ancora. The new state health lab will be an upgrade on the old, out-of-date one and help the Department of Health respond to infectious diseases and overdose prevention, among other needs.

The Department of Health will pay for its portion of the building with the help of an \$81.7 million grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The state will own its portion, akin to owning a condo in a larger development. Private funding will pay for the rest of the lab space. The construction partner is Dimeo.

"This project is crucial to ensuring our state's economic momentum continues as we make key investments in public health and the life science industry here in Rhode Island," McKee said in a news release Wednesday.

The state health lab site is one of several projects where ceremonial groundbreakings last year (a gubernatorial election year) weren't quickly followed by actual work on the site.