AMICSTL
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Construction on North City manufacturing hub to start later, but officials say progress has been made

By James Drew – Reporter, St. Louis Business Journal, Jul 10, 2024

On a frigid but sunny day in late November 2023, supporters of the proposed advanced manufacturing center in north St. Louis gathered in an open field after making several speeches under a large tent.

Missouri Gov. Mike Parson and business leaders clutched shovels to turn over dirt at the ceremonial groundbreaking. Earlier, Kory Mathews, CEO-executive director of AMICSTL, said in an interview that construction was scheduled to start in mid-2024 on the first phase of the project.

Construction now is expected to begin in late October or early November on the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Center-STL, with completion in the first or second quarter of 2026.

“Probably we were maybe a little bit on the optimistic side of getting through all of the design work and getting through the construction documents,” Mathews, a former Boeing Co. vice president for enterprise services, said earlier this week.

“No roadblocks, no obstacles; it’s just normal working through a project and making sure that we get this phase right and that we have all of the elements that we need and want in there to successfully expand our operations,” he added.

There’s a lot at stake. The nonprofit group leading the project has said the goal is to make the St. Louis area a driver of research and development efforts to create new products, processes and materials – potentially creating hundreds of new businesses while providing "strong, diverse and equitable growth" for the region.

Fox Architects in January issued a request for professional qualifications for design services that showed construction to start in August, but that timeline has been extended. The firms hired by AMICSTL for design services are:

- Buro Happold for mechanical; electrical; plumbing and fire protection; energy; sustainability; façade; audio visual; security; daylighting; and technology consulting
- David Mason & Associates for civil engineering
- IMEG for structural engineering
- Planning Design Studio for landscaping
- Reed Burkett Lighting Design for lighting

Mathews said the construction documents will be complete by early September. AMICSTL will seek approval from the U.S. Economic Development Administration for those documents as well as the request for proposals for a general contractor – as required by the $7 million grant that AMICSTL is receiving under the federal Build Back Better Regional Challenge.

AMICSTL has raised about $40 million, which will enable completion of the first phase totaling 85,000 square feet, Mathews said. The price-tag of the first phase in part will be determined by the responses to the RFP for the general contractor, he said.

An earlier estimate put the cost of both phases of the building at $55 million to $60 million, but Mathews said the amount is expected to be higher. The size of the first phase has been increased from an estimated 60,000 to 70,000 square feet to 85,000 square feet, and the total size of the two phases from 150,000 square feet to 165,000 square feet.

“I don’t have an updated estimate of the total master plan, but it will be north of the $55 million to $60 million, but how far north is still TBD,” Mathews said, using the acronym for “to be determined.”

Inside AMICSTL will be high bay research and development manufacturing space, advanced specialty labs and corresponding equipment, community spaces for training and community activities, and an auditorium for world-class technical conferences and product showcases, Mathews said.

Although the construction schedule has moved back, the project has made significant progress since that ceremonial groundbreaking in November 2023, AMICSTL leaders said.

The city of St. Louis has demolished three abandoned structures at the southwest corner of Finney and Pendleton avenues to make way for part of the advanced manufacturing center. AMICSTL is working with the city to get the zoning approval and permits needed. The site currently is zoned neighborhood commercial and probably will need a zoning change or a conditional use permit, said Tracy Henke, AMICSTL’s chief operating officer and deputy executive director.

“The way that the zoning currently works doesn’t envision a facility like ours in an area that is zoned as (neighborhood commercial) so we are working with the city, neighborhood, Alderwoman (Sharon Tyus), and others to accomplish what we need,” said Henke, a former chief policy officer at Greater St. Louis Inc., the region’s lead economic development agency.

AMICSTL also has launched its research and development programming, working with one company to help it improve its operations and another to do a cost-benefit analysis on making parts through additive manufacturing. It is the process in which a product is made building something up, such as molding, and is commonly referred to as 3-D printing.

Mathews said plans to work with two more companies are in the works. He declined to identify the four companies. AMISTL is working with its R&D co-chairs – Saint Louis University and the University of Missouri-St. Louis — on that program.

“We want to get a number of these under our belt,” he said.

AMICSTL also has begun its role as a “neutral convener” in workforce development. On July 17, the nonprofit group will host 30 participants in the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater St. Louis' Skilled Trades Exploration Program (STEP). The half-day skilled trades program is in partnership with Ranken Technical College, SLU's Center for Additive Manufacturing, Chesterfield-based MiTek Inc. and the Gateway South project. The students, between the ages of 16 and 18, will learn about additive manufacturing on the Ranken campus.

“We’re in the crawl, walk, run phase. We’re probably on the tail end of the crawl and starting to walk a little bit in our programming,” Mathews said.

Henke, AMICSTL’s chief operating officer and deputy executive director, said the group has convened meetings with various industry sectors including aerospace, automotive and geospatial. Those four-hour sessions have foreshadowed the collaboration on advanced manufacturing that will occur when the first phase of AMICSTL opens.

“We anticipate once the building is open that the need for the second phase is going to be immediate; that the first phase will fill quickly,” she said.