



## The Birmingham News

### Dingy overpass gets more welcoming

**City, companies do quick makeover**

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Businesses near the 20th Street railroad overpass in downtown and the city of Birmingham are working together to spruce up the area in an effort to improve economic prospects and quell fears about safety.

The partnership, initiated last week, has proceeded at a quick clip, an encouraging sign for a business community that has yearned for a City Hall that promptly responds to its needs.

City crews started work this week, replacing lights along the street and the pedestrian walkway under the overpass. They also washed the concrete structure and plan to give it a fresh coat of paint.

Meanwhile, surrounding businesses are supplying the paint and also have agreed to pressure wash the overpass every few months, Operation New Birmingham President Michael Calvert said.

"It will go from being dingy and dirty to bright and white," he said. "We've got public/private cooperation breaking out right before our eyes."

On Jan. 30, Calvert met with representatives from businesses in the area who were concerned about the dingy look of the overpass and lights that didn't work.

The businesses include Superior Bank, Compass Bank, Alabama Gas Corp. and Harbert Realty Services.

The next day, Calvert talked to Birmingham Mayor Larry Langford, who said the city should do something about the concerns.

Don Lupo with the Mayor's Office of Citizens Assistance checked around and determined that city crews could do the work if the businesses would provide the paint.

Calvert said the fresh look will spur economic prospects for surrounding businesses. For example, he said Superior Bank is renovating a nearby parking deck, with plans to put a mortgage office on the ground floor.

The work, especially the operable lighting, also will make it easier for employees and customers of the businesses, as well as other pedestrians, to use the walkway under the overpass.

"It helps a lot with the perceived comfort level," Calvert said.

Employees of Harbert Realty Services, which moved in December to the nearby Two North Twentieth building, had expressed concerns about the structure, said President and Chief Executive Harry Lynch.

"Some of the ladies in the office, when they go out walking, won't go under it. They feel intimidated because it's dark and dreary. That sort of got our radar focused on it," Lynch said.

Harbert Realty Services also handles leasing and management of the Two North Twentieth building, and Lynch said a prospect eyeing space there has been apprehensive about its employees having to walk under the overpass.

The prospect's parking spaces would be located on the opposite side of the overpass from the building.

Lynch said he never expected such a quick turnaround on the project.

"We brought it up last week, and here we are just over a week later. All the lights have been fixed, they're starting to do pressure washing and I understand the painting will happen within the next few days. That's truly a remarkable feat for the city to jump on something that quickly and get it done," he said.

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