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H&M store on Woodward could attract more retailers to downtown Detroit

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Finished exterior facade of 1515 and 1529 Woodward before retail tenants move in on September 27th, 2019
(Photo: Bedrock Detroit)

Detroit — The downtown is poised for new business, and retailers are taking note.

Swedish clothing retailer H&M will open a store in downtown Detroit this fall.

The retailer has leased 25,000 square feet of space from Bedrock in three adjoining buildings at 1505, 1515 and 1529 Woodward, at the northwest corner of Woodward and Clifford. That's in a stretch of retailers that have opened in recent years, including the high-end John Varvatos menswear store directly across Woodward, and the Lululemon yoga-apparel store across Clifford.

"H&M is one of those flagship retail stores that will take the Woodward Avenue shops to another level," Dan Gilbert, Bedrock founder and chairman, said in a statement Wednesday. H&M will be the largest retailer in Bedrock's portfolio, the company said.

Retail experts say the move illustrates the returning health of downtown Detroit and will attract more big-name stores.



"The fact that H&M has decided to locate in downtown Detroit shows that there is a scalable fashion-forward demand with consumers," said Ken Nisch, chairman of JGA, Southfield-based retail design firm that works with companies including H&M. "H&M brings that international, fast-fashion appeal."

The news is a boost for Detroit's economic growth and image, Nisch said. The store will bring jobs because of its sales volume.

"It's a store people go to when they want to browse, which means higher foot-traffic more often," Nisch said. "This lays out a welcome mat for other interested retailers, where Detroit is more interesting and appealing to global retailers over U.S. retailers."

H&M sells trendy, mass-market priced women's, men's and children's apparel.

In a statement Wednesday, the retailer said, "H&M always looks for the best locations to open new stores, having already opened several in the greater Detroit area. We are thrilled to announce this

new location at 1505 Woodward Avenue to provide our customers and fans in Detroit with even more affordable fashion at the best price and in a sustainable way."

In the last few years, downtown Detroit has seen an influx of businesses open along Woodward Avenue, including Nike, Warby Parker, Under Armour, Moosejaw, Bonobos and Madewell.

Could the arrival of H&M bring a big-name retailer the likes of Apple or Target?

"Definitely Apple," said Ken Dalto, a Metro Detroit retail industry analyst. "Target, yes, because Target has an urban strategy."

The city, he said, "is no longer off-limits as it was 10, 15 years ago."

He expects as many as six or eight companies to follow with announcements within the next year.

"H&M being as sophisticated as it is, is putting an imprint on Detroit," he said. "They've done demographic studies, and they're exhaustive, when they decide to go somewhere and plant down a new retail store. They've probably done a year's worth of research. What they are seeing is more business moving down, more retail going up before them. More apartments being constructed, residential housing, more safety... They don't take these things lightly. It's deeper than one store, a nice store. It means a lot for a retailer of that sort to back up Detroit."

The storefronts that H & M will occupy had been largely vacant for at least a decade. For a brief period, the Henry Ford Health System operated a QuickCare clinic at 1515 Woodward. There was talk in 2015 of Restoration Hardware, a luxury home furnishing retailer, opening an outlet space on the corner, but that never materialized.

The H&M store not only means occupied storefronts, it will lead to increased foot-traffic for businesses like Italian cafe and deli La Pecora Nera, located around the corner on Washington Boulevard.

"It's going to bring more people into the city," owner Zach Kostegian said. "I think that's what the city needs. It's going to make it look better from the street view. Instead of empty storefronts you're going to have stores, with people walking to the stores. It will bring more life to the street."

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Staff Writer Louis Aguilar contributed.