

Kevin Daniels talks about what's next for landmark Sears store in Sodo

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The owner of the massive building that housed a Sears store is trying to figure out what to do with the retail space in the massive Starbucks Center in South Seattle. Sears closed the store last year.

For more than a century, Sears operated in one of Seattle's biggest buildings, where Starbucks is headquartered today. Nine months after Sears closed the Sodo store at 76 S. Lander St., building owner Nitze-Stagen is trying to come up with a plan.

"We have a variety of great ideas for it," Nitze-Stagen President and CEO Kevin Daniels said Monday. Planning, however, is on hold because the company cannot, under its legal contract with Sears, start exploring options for Sears' former space until the lease for the approximately 150,000 square feet runs out at the end of the year.

This hasn't stopped Nitze-Stagen from thinking about what might happen. Daniels said he thinks the first floor will be retail no matter what. "But to find second- and third-floor retail, which I'd love to do, is just difficult in any retail environment," Daniels said. Retail on "third floors die."

Daniels said Nitze-Stagen may explore turning floor two into what the rest of the sprawling Starbucks Center is: "innovation space," small manufacturing and storage space. Nitze-Stagen has office space on the third floor adjacent to the old Sears, so that presents some opportunities as well, he said.

According to Nitze-Stagen, Starbucks (Nasdaq: SBUX) Center measures just over 2.1 million square feet and sits on 17 acres. The building is "a one-of-a-kind mixed-used facility," blending retail, office, warehousing, manufacturing and distribution functions, the Nitze-Stagen website says.

The Union Pacific Railroad built the center to lure Sears (Nasdaq: SHLD) to the building that Nitze-Stagen says was constructed from heavy timbers from the Yesler Mill.

"Emboldened by the sale of lady's undergarments to Alaska, Sears built an addition in 1914 which was the largest structure west of Chicago at the time of its completion," according to the Nitze-Stagen website.

In 1925 Sears opened a retail store at the site. Nitze-Stagen said it was the oldest continuously operating Sears store in the world until it closed last year. With various additions over the years, the complex may be the largest multi-tenanted building west of the Mississippi, according to Nitze-Stagen.