County Executive: Sparrows Point Mill To Be Razed

Kasey Jones, Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — The Sparrows Point steel mill, which in its heyday during and after World War II employed some 30,000 workers, will be razed, bringing an end to more than a century of steelmaking in Baltimore County.

Baltimore County Executive Kevin Kamenetz said Thursday that an owner of the plant, Hilco Industrial, told him that despite worldwide marketing, "no interested party wants to operate an existing steel mill."

Kamenetz said Hilco officials told him the company would sell every remaining asset and bring the structure to the ground.

Gary Epstein, chief marketing officer for Hilco, said there was no timeline for demolition.

Epstein confirmed that Charlotte, N.C.-based steelmaker Nucor Corp. has purchased Sparrows Point's 12-year-old cold mill complex, which will be incorporated into Nucor facilities elsewhere. Epstein declined to give the sale price or other details, citing a confidentiality agreement between Hilco and Nucor.

A Nucor spokeswoman did not immediately return a telephone message Thursday evening.

The sale to Nucor dashed any remaining hope that the mill on the 3,400-acre Baltimore site would reopen.

Sparrows Point has been closed since its then-owner, RG Steel, filed for bankruptcy in Delaware in May. Some 2,000 workers were idled then.

Hilco and its joint venture partner, Environmental Liability Transfer Inc., said after purchasing Sparrows Point in bankruptcy for $72 million that there was a chance it could remain a going concern. But Epstein said an "extremely aggressive" marketing effort over several months to find a new operator for the mill bore no fruit.

"We did not find a qualified buyer that was interested in operating it in that way," he said. "We were certainly open and eager to find an ideal buyer and market it as such... All options were on the table."

Kamenetz and Gov. Martin O'Malley said they were disappointed.

Joe Rosel, president of the United Steelworkers Local 9477 in Sparrows Point, told

The Baltimore Sun that the union had been working with an investment banking firm to identify potential operators. He promised to organize a rally in protest.

According to Hilco's website, the Sparrows Point Steel Mill opened in 1889 and once was the world's largest steel mill. It supplied steel for the Golden Gate Bridge, the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and hundreds of ships during World War II.

Bethlehem Steel bought the plant in 1916. Bethlehem Steel filed for bankruptcy in 2001 and Sparrows Point has had four owners since then, according to Hilco's website.

Kamenetz said while steelmaking appears to be coming to a close in Baltimore County, he was optimistic that modern jobs can be brought to Sparrows Point. He said the peninsula offers deepwater access by port and has two rail lines.

"There is a future for Sparrows Point," Kamenetz said.

The county executive said the country is working with state and federal government to assist displaced steelworkers.

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