

# Thermo Fisher will take over CannonDesign building on Grand Island

By [Stephen T. Watson](#) | Published May 3, 2019 | Updated May 4, 2019

Thermo Fisher Scientific will take over CannonDesign's headquarters on Grand Island after the nationally known architecture firm completes its move to downtown Buffalo.

The life sciences company will retain its location on Staley Road, where it has about 800 workers, while leasing the Cannon building on Whitehaven Road, a Thermo Fisher spokesman said. The shift of some employees will open up additional manufacturing space at its current site. "As the business in Grand Island continues to expand, we have identified the need to relocate a number of employees to a second location," company spokesman Ronald O'Brien said in an email. "We have secured a site on Whitehaven Road and plan to begin the transfer of some operations in late 2019."

The Thermo Fisher move means a prominent structure on the island won't sit vacant for long. It also thwarts Grand Island Supervisor Nathan McMurray's efforts to acquire the Cannon building for new town offices. McMurray, who had pursued a deal for months, planned to ask the Town Board on Monday for permission to negotiate a sale contract with Cannon. He said Friday he's frustrated the town won't be able to use the building but he is glad a large, long-standing employer on the island is the new tenant.

Cannon, an international architecture and design firm, has occupied its headquarters at 2170 Whitehaven Road since 1972. The company in recent years began exploring relocating from Grand Island, with Buffalo a logical option because Cannon has so many projects underway there. Cannon on Friday for the first time confirmed previous reports that it will move into just under 35,000 square feet of space at 50 Fountain Plaza, taking up the mezzanine level of the building. Starting in August, Cannon will move into four floors of 50 Fountain on a temporary basis while it designs its permanent work space.

Constructed in 1990, the 423,000-square-foot Fountain Plaza complex consists of a 15-story north and an 11-story south tower and is managed by Ciminelli Real Estate Corp. "This is about CannonDesign physically moving downtown, but also about moving toward exciting new possibilities for our team, Fountain Plaza, the urban core and the Buffalo region," Michael Tunkey, principal for CannonDesign, said in a statement.

Grand Island officials worried about the loss of Cannon's large work force and about the effect of an empty headquarters building.

McMurray said he tried to convince Cannon to stay but once it was clear they had their mind set on leaving, he saw the building filling a need for the town. McMurray said Town Hall and other town buildings at the former Nike Base on the island are outdated and in need of extensive repairs. He said he thought the town could negotiate the purchase of the Cannon building at a reasonable price. "We were there first," McMurray said.

But other Town Board members balked at the idea, calling the building too large and costly for the town's small number of employees. "That's a want," said Town Board member Michael Madigan, "that is not a need." McMurray now blames the Town Board for killing any chance for the town to take control of the Cannon building and said the town still requires new, upgraded facilities. He singles out Madigan for his sharpest criticism, saying he had a conflict of interest because he both serves on the Town Board and works as a senior program manager for Thermo Fisher.

Madigan responded by saying he played no role in the property search conducted by the international company and didn't pass confidential information from the town to Thermo Fisher, or vice versa. "That's above my pay grade," he said. "That's not something I'm involved in."

Thermo Fisher will move in after Cannon completes its move off the island in September. The fast-growing company for some time has looked for additional space for its Staley Road operations. Thermo Fisher still is deciding which groups of employees will move to the Whitehaven Road building, O'Brien said, and doesn't know exactly how many employees it will hire as part of its expansion. The company informed its employees of the lease on Wednesday, he said.

Thermo Fisher took over the Staley Road complex in 2013 when it purchased Life Technologies Corp. Life Technologies started on Grand Island in 1962 as GIBCO, or Grand Island Biological Co. The plant makes cell culture media and reagents, powders and liquids scientists use as nutrients to grow cells.