

# Work halted on Mausert Block in Adams

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Work on the Mausert Block in Adams has temporarily been stopped by the town. (Eagle file photo)

ADAMS -- Town officials have issued a work stoppage order at the Mausert Block, where a property development company has been renovating the former Woolworth's building to house two restaurants, a dance studio and apartments.

Building Inspector Donald Fitzgerald said he requested a walk-through inspection of the premises and to examine the plans for the work in order to update the records on the project.

"There is so much documentation in conflict and misinformation on the building permit that I don't know what's going on there," he said. "And no one has ever allowed me to do an inspection."

While the building permit was issued last year by the former building inspector, there are technical questions that need to be addressed and insufficient information to define the scope of the work, Fitzgerald said.

Fitzgerald is seeking information such as what has been proposed for the structure, what is being changed, and what kinds of code upgrades are triggered by the work that is being done.

According to Stephen Stenson, a principal at REDPM, the property development company that owns the building, he had been informed that the previous building inspector was no longer with the town, and that "a state inspector was to take over when we re-started work in May after the project had been on hold due to the electrical transformer issues. However, it is our understanding that the (new) local inspector was not informed of this until he tried to gain access to the building on May 20.

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Stenson noted that Jonathan Butler, Adams town administrator, told him on May 22 that the transfer paperwork was awaiting state approval and as a result the local inspector was still technically responsible for the project.

"As the paperwork was imminent, REDPM voluntarily stopped work until the required state paperwork was complete and a new inspector in place," Stenson said. "Despite the work being stopped and in the full knowledge that he was being replaced, the local inspector issued the Stop Work Order the next day anyway."

Fitzgerald said inadequate information and conflicting paperwork resulted in the need for an inspection.

"We issue permits based on accurate information," he said. "It's entirely about life and safety. We try to ensure the reasonable expectation of anybody in that building that it is safe and meets the minimum standards of the state building code."

The three businesses were permitted for the Park Street structure by the Zoning Board of Appeals in February 2013, and the Mausert Block apartments were permitted in July 2013.

Stenson said last November that the 11 planned apartments would be one to three bedrooms and 700- to 1,300-square-feet. At the time, the former Woolworth's store space was slated to become a gourmet pizza shop called "21 Park Pizza," and the Asian fusion restaurant was set for 23 Park St. The dance studio was planned for 19 Park St.

When Fitzgerald requested a walk-through of the project, he noted that the owners declined.

"I told them if they continued on without an inspection, I would issue a stop-work order," he said.

The stop-work order was posted on May 23. As of last week, the building remained vacant with the interior space seemingly in the midst of construction.

Stenson said REDPM is working with state and town officials to rectify the situation.

"We and the state authorities are working to re-issue the town's missing information," he said. "We are awaiting final discussions between the state and town on who will be the inspector responsible going forward."

He said the intention is to restart work on the Mausert Block in late June and complete the retail spaces by the end of July.

"We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our retail tenants, all of whom are still onboard, and MassDevelopment who stepped in to finance the project last year," Stenson said. "We are all committed to bringing to fruition this essential project to the regeneration of downtown Adams in the next year."