

New Food & Wellness Vision Planned for Historic Mausert Block

By Jack Guerino*iBerkshires Staff*, 06:31AM / Saturday, July 20, 2019

ADAMS, Mass. — The owner of the Mausert Block is assuring the Selectmen that there's progress being made at the former Woolworth building across from Town Hall.

Stephen Stenson provided the board with a project update on Wednesday.

He said the renovation of 10 apartments in the upper floors are nearing completion and there are plans for a shared restaurant and kitchen space as well as wellness collaborative on the first floor.



Stephen Stenson and Heather Cachat, left, give the board an update on the new plans for the Mausert Block.

"This is not the end but the beginning of the end and I think we are moving forward and wrapping up the apartments," Stenson said. "We are going back to reinvest more money into the restaurant area and we hope that is the first step in developing these ideas."

The Stensons purchased the structure as Braytonville LLC for \$60,000 and are developing it through their real estate management firm REDPM, which stands for real estate development property management. Exterior work on the 1920 brick structure was largely completed in 2013. REDPM matched a \$125,000 federal grant the town received in 2011 to overhaul the exterior and storefronts and the got a \$700,000 MassDevelopment in 2014 for interior work.



The developer REDPM opened an office in the former Woolworth building last fall.

The board had invited Stenson to a meeting to provide an update and a new vision for the building. Stenson said updated plans are to install a shared commercial kitchen facility in the historic building

"There is no commercial kitchen in the Northern Berkshires. The closest one is in Greenfield," he said. "We are talking to individual people and culinary artists.

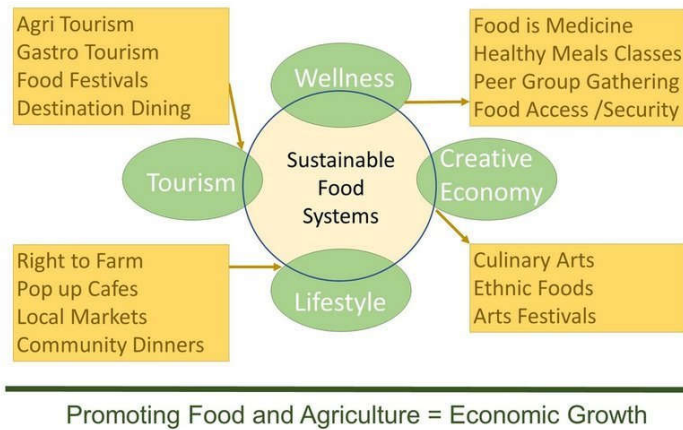
They can have access to a commercial kitchen and they can provide their services to North County."

The second piece of the collaborative space would be a shared restaurant.

"Instead of just relying on the services of the kitchen, we are actually allowing people to open up restaurants, pop-up restaurants, open up for an event, just a weekend, open for a festival," he said. "So there is a range of things."

He said there is the potential for outdoor seating along the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail in the back of the building and the new street-side windows can all open to bring new life to Park Street

Adams Food Innovation District



Creating a commercial kitchen and shared restaurant space will promote local farming and attract tourists, according to the new plans.

She said this district could put Adams on the map and not only create jobs but attract tourism.

"Right now the Berkshires are trying to brand themselves and each town is trying to brand themselves," she said. "North Adams and other towns are cultural art destinations and people are driving through Adams every day ... Adams could be a destination for diverse cultural food."

Stenson also introduced local yoga and meditation instructor Howard Rosenberg to present the third piece of the Mausert Block vision and he said the plan is to open a collaborative wellness area.

"Most people know what it takes to be healthy ... but how many people actually do it," Rosenberg asked rhetorically. "So the idea is to create social groups of five to 10 people and have them meet in groups and expose them to the wellness practices in the area, which there is no shortage of."

He added with the kitchen, they can also help train people how to cook more nutritiously.

Stenson said he is in the process of applying for a MassDevelopment co-working grant but could not disclose how much he has applied for. He said the grant would be awarded in the fall.

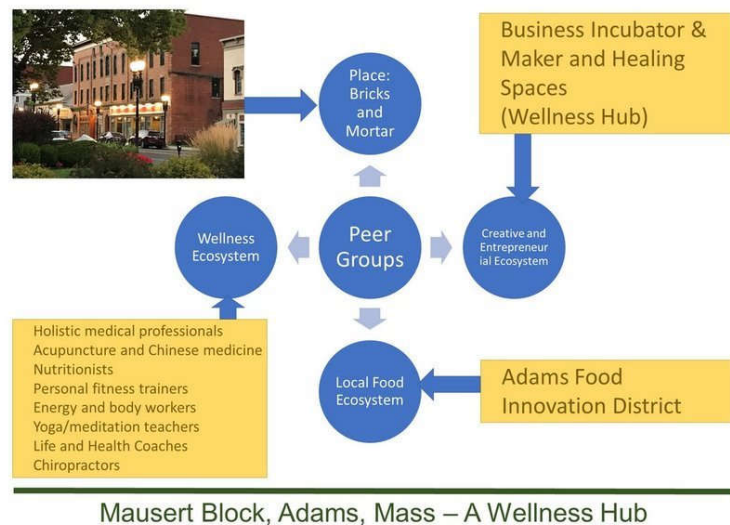
He did ask for a letter of support from the town, which Selectmen obliged. Stenson did extend an invitation to the board to see the apartments when they were complete and the Selectmen agreed they were looking forward to the tour.

Heather Cachat, a small-business owner who had been involved with downtown efforts, said this would be the first step in creating a food innovation district in downtown Adams.

"Its purpose is to connect and promote food and agricultural activity in the area," she said. "We have a lot of farms but we need to connect them all together and promote them ... we want to support and develop the business community."

There would be an effort within the community to use local produce, Cachat said, and instead of trucking food across the country, the food district would look to connect local farmers to businesses, schools, organizations, and the community at large.

Greylock Wellness Collaborative



Stenson believes this will help support a wellness center that can be an incubator for related services.