

Project launch for city mill site

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For more pictures of the former silk mill, click here.

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PITTSFIELD -- Work will begin today toward the conversion of the former A.H. Rice silk mill into affordable housing -- a \$14.7 million project that local business leaders and housing officials expect will revitalize the Morningside neighborhood.

Armed with a \$306,000 state grant, Pittsfield has hired J. H. Maxymillian Inc. to install new water and sewer connections on Spring and Burbank streets and curb and sidewalk improvements along Spring, Willow, Cherry and Burbank streets, according to city officials.



The city of Pittsfield will begin road work today in... (Stephanie Zollshan / Berkshire Eagle Staff)

Spring Street between Burbank and Willow will be closed to through traffic until Nov. 10 due to the utility and sidewalk construction.

Meanwhile, the official groundbreaking ceremony for the 45-unit Rice Silk Mill Apartments is planned for 11 a.m. Oct. 28 at the vacant 132-year-old factory at 55 Spring St., according to Jon Rudzinski of Rees-Larkin Development.

Rudzinski's firm is using loans and federal and state tax credits toward the project's redevelopment cost. He said the renovation work should be completed in July.

The housing complex will be a combination of one-, two- and three-bedroom units; the monthly rents for the affordable housing are still be calculated, said Rudzinski.

"We'll start marketing the apartments this winter, well before they are completed," he said. "This will have a tremendous impact on the area as it takes up a whole city block."

Berkshire Housing Development Corp. will market and manage the housing complex the Pittsfield-based agency considers a boon to the local housing stock.

“The development of this property is an important one for the city and has generated significant interest with residents in the community,” said Lisa Wright, Berkshire Housing’s vice president of development.

In addition, Rudzinski believes the housing will be a boost for are businesses, especially those on Tyler Street. Diane Marcella, president of the Tyler Street Business Group, says her organization welcomes an influx of potentially new customers.

"It's a great fit for the neighborhood," Marcella said. "The developers have expressed that they want to work with our community."

While the Pittsfield Community Development Board endorsed the proposed complex in May 2009, Rudzinski needed almost two years to secure \$7.7 million in federal tax credits necessary for his development company to purchase the property.

The A.H. Rice silk mill last operated as a factory nearly five years ago. The previous owner, Jim Miller, moved the manufacturing operation at the Spring Street mill to his plant in South Carolina in December 2005.

While several small, non-historic structures will be razed for the creation of a courtyard and more green space, the developer has said the rest of the old mill will undergo a "full historic rehabilitation."

The Architectural Team of Chelsea and Keith Construction from Stoughton have been hired to refurbish the mill.

"They specialize in adaptive reuse of mill buildings, especially those in residential neighborhoods," said Rudzinski.

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