

## Burlington Free Press

Estimated printed pages: 3

June 9, 2004

**Section:** Business

**Page:** 04A

### Winooski makeover begins

*Matt Sutkoski*

*Staff*

*The Burlington Free Press*

After groundbreaking, more details emerge

By Matt Sutkoski

WINOOSKI The financial wrangling over downtown Winooski's rebirth is all but finished as construction starts, but details of what the business district will look like is still in flux.

The basics are set: Workers will soon start building a new headquarters for the Vermont Student Assistance Corp. They'll also build what is known as the West Block, which will contain upper-floor student housing and 15,000 square feet of ground floor retail space.

The building would encircle a municipal parking garage with 965 spaces.

No decisions have been made yet on which retailers will go into West Block, which, after all, doesn't exist yet. Interest is growing, however.

"Demand for the retail space is very high. HallKeen is getting more calls than they know what to do with," said Winooski Community Development Corp. Director Bill Niquette.

HallKeen is the overall project's housing developer. HallKeen Project Manager Ken Braverman said he expects to have no trouble filling the retail portions of the West Block.

The future of the Champlain Mill is also in question. It's owned by the Pecor family, but HallKeen has an option to buy the historic structure.

VSAC is scheduled to move out of the Champlain Mill in the fall or early winter of 2005 and into their new headquarters. HallKeen officials have said they want to convert much of the mill into 75 loft-style apartments, with retail space on the ground floor.

Current mill owner Ray Pecor said he would part with the mill only reluctantly. Pecor said he doesn't really want to sell the building, but those involved in developing the downtown Winooski project felt the mill was an important part of the entire proposal.

Pecor said he wouldn't mind seeing other alternatives for the mill explored.

"A dream would be offices in the top floors and a combination of city government offices so this could be the focal point of downtown Winooski," he said.

Elsewhere in downtown Winooski, work is nearing completion on a new four-story building on Main Street. An adjacent building is receiving major renovations. The two buildings, which are expected to open by autumn, would contain mostly offices.

Casey Family Services will occupy the ground floor of the new building and the second floor of both buildings, said Jeb Dousevicz, the marketing supervisor for V/T Commercial, which is handling lease arrangements for the building.

Casey Family Services is a nonprofit child welfare agency, which helps with foster care and services for families .

The two upper floors of the new Main Street building, comprising a total of 8,400 square feet, have not been leased yet, but there have been inquiries, Dousevicz said.

"There's been a really positive buzz around Winooski. There's been a lot of calls and interest in our projects, and people are calling me about Winooski in general," Dousevicz said.

Businesses that have been in Winooski for a long time are also gearing up for the downtown redevelopment.

McKee's Pub on East Allen Street has been in town 16 years, owner Lance McKee said. He recently renovated the business, and left space for a new kitchen. Now that construction of the downtown has been approved and construction workers are about to swarm the city, McKee said he is going to get the kitchen up and running and start serving lunches and Sunday brunch.

"I've seen two other redevelopment projects come and go, but this one is definitely happening,"

McKee said.

Box: GLENN RUSSELL, Free Press A groundbreaking ceremony for the Downtown Winooski Redevelopment Project was held outside the Champlain Mill on Monday. Governor Jim Douglas (at podium) spoke to the crowd.

Contact Matt Sutkoski at 660-1846 or [msutkosk@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com](mailto:msutkosk@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com)

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