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NEIGHBORHOOD REDEVELOPMENT PLANS GAIN TRACTION IN BRISTOL

A small group of local, veteran business leaders has launched Bristol Works!, LLC and recently closed on the purchase of approximately 6 acres and 55,000 square feet of commercial buildings in the heart of the Bristol village. The partners have begun the transformation of the former Autumn Harp manufacturing site into a new, mixed-use redevelopment project that will focus on health and wellness, educational services, light-manufacturing and housing.

“We care deeply about this community, and want to keep working families in Bristol,” says Kevin Harper, founder of Autumn Harp. Harper was the Managing Partner of the Mountain Greens Market redevelopment project, is currently the lead partner of the Bristol Bakery and Café, and now manages Bristol Works!, LLC. “We want to use our resources and skills to re-purpose this site to be a focal point for the creation of livable wage jobs, and to enhance the health, well-being, and economic security of the region.”

The Bristol Works! Partners

The project hopes to infuse the neighborhood, the town, and the region with the innovation and energy that accompanies projects undertaken by Harper and some of his Bristol Works! partners.

Robert Fuller is a well-known, regional restaurateur. Fuller is the owner of Leunig’s Bistro, the founder of Bristol’s popular Bobcat Café, and was the lead partner in the redevelopment of Cubbers and Snaps restaurants, two of Bristol’s well-known eateries.

David Blittersdorf is the founder of Hinesburg-based NRG Systems, a global leader in the development and manufacture of wind measurement devices. He is also the founder and President/CEO of AllEarth Renewables, a company in Williston that designs and manufactures grid-connected solar tracking devices and residential-scale wind power systems.

Bristol Works! has engaged the services of Bristol architect **Tommie Thompson**, of Twenty4D Architects, to transform the series of steel and pre-cast concrete buildings into a mixed use campus that will be home to some of the areas most promising job-creating sectors: health care/wellness, recreation, value-add food products manufacturing and green products manufacturing.

Thompson says: “The Bristol Works! project reflects a true commitment to the scale, character and uses that define Bristol’s historic village environment. We will utilize the imagery of a renovated mill complex to unite the town’s rich manufacturing past with the present. By employing design elements that pay homage to the town’s working past, we embrace a new vision of living and working within the village.”

What's Coming

The first phase of the project will include a complete renovation of one 10,000 square foot building on the south end of the campus. This will serve as the office complex for two non-profit service providers.

The second phase of the project is planned to include the start-up of multiple value-add agriculture manufacturing enterprises and a mix of alternative energy businesses that will utilize the 25,000 square feet of manufacturing space.

In the third phase, construction is planned to begin on a limited number of mixed income, multi-generational housing units. Harper is confident that there will be a demand for cottage style, super-efficient homes of compact size and scale. Back in the early 1900's, many of the homes surrounding the industrial site were constructed as affordable homes for workers at the Vermont Box Company and the Drake Smith Company. "We would like to reclaim that legacy for those citizens who value living near the place where they work," says Harper. He thinks that this type of housing will appeal to working people and to empty-nest baby boomers alike.

Phase One to focus on Health and Education services

Nancy Marnellos, Chair of the Board of the Five-Town Health Alliance, Inc. (5THA), has been working closely with Harper's team to locate a new Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in the Bristol Works! complex. The FQHC model offers primary care, dental, behavioral health, and preventive healthcare services to everyone, regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. "We are very excited about locating our health center in the Bristol Works! complex," says Marnellos. "The objectives of the project and our health center are to support and encourage the health and well-being of our community—our goals are totally complementary."

Harper and Architect Thompson have also been working with Evelyn Howard, Superintendent of the North East Supervisory Union, to relocate the NESU to a smaller, more efficient space on the Bristol Works! campus. The NESU Board recently approved the move from the current Lover's Lane location as soon as the new facility is ready, presumably early summer, 2011.

The Bristol Works! team has met with adjoining neighbors, the Planning Commission and the Select Board. Renovations are expected to begin later this winter.

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