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Allegrone Cos. plans to redevelop Wright Building in downtown Pittsfield

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By Amanda Drane, The Berkshire Eagle

PITTSFIELD — A prominent Pittsfield developer has plans for North Street's historic Wright Building that could fit another piece into downtown's redevelopment puzzle.

Allegrone Cos. plans to redevelop the building at 255 North St. in the same way it restored the historic Onota and Howard (<https://www.berkshireeagle.com/stories/massachusetts-historical-commission-honors-2-restored-downtown-pittsfield-buildings,523547>) buildings, Lou Allegrone told The Eagle on Wednesday. He estimates that the project will cost \$7.5 million and bring 16 to 20 market-rate apartments to North Street, as well as 12,000 square feet of retail space.

Allegrone said the company also hopes to work with the city in creating a walkway behind the building that would connect it to the Columbus Avenue Parking Garage and the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority.

Sen. Adam Hinds, D-Pittsfield, said developments like this one help meet the demand for high-quality housing and draw foot traffic to downtown.

"It's great news," Hinds said. "We've seen a tremendous revitalization throughout the downtown, and this has been identified as a critical target area."

Allegrone said the company hasn't closed on the property, yet, but it has struck a preliminary agreement with the current owner, Cavalier Management, and plans to purchase the building in September. The pending purchase prompted eviction notices (<https://www.berkshireeagle.com/stories/candle-lanes-and-others-facing-eviction,546188>) last week in doorways of the building's existing upstairs commercial tenants — including century-old Candle Lanes — which have a month to leave.

Allegrone said that while he is a fan of Candle Lanes (<https://www.berkshireeagle.com/stories/for-enthusiasts-candlepin-bowling-in-pittsfield-is-right-up-their-alley,536593>), modern-day accessibility and safety standards would be an obstacle to keeping the upstairs bowling alley. The alley has been upstairs since 1914, and a major renovation project would trigger the need to comply with modern state and federal standards.

"The building is at the end of its life cycle, so it absolutely needs to see a full-scale redevelopment," Allegrone said.

Meantime, the alley's owner, George Aslan, said he heard from a bowling alley in Woburn that is interested in buying his equipment.

"If it pans out, it'd be real good news," Aslan said Wednesday.

Allegrone said he'd love to see a version of Candle Lanes reappear in a first-floor space, but Aslan said his age and his leukemia make a move unattractive.

"If I were 50, I'd consider it," he said.

While displaced artists leasing space in the building found Cavalier's short notice and delivery method "deplorable," Bob Balogh said he and other tenants have been hearing from downtown landlords with available studio space. The city's cultural development director, Jen Glockner, said she also would be happy to help artists in their search for new studios.

Parking an economic obstacle

But to support the Wright development and others like it, Allegrone said city officials have to do their part to grow the downtown parking base. To that end, the city's community development director, Deanna Ruffer, said she applied for a MassWorks grant this week.

If approved, the state money would help Pittsfield raise the \$11 million needed to demolish the existing Columbus Avenue Parking Garage and build a 378-space garage in its place. The City Council already approved \$2 million toward the project, she said, and City Hall is committed to raising at least \$2 million more if the state promises support.

The parking garage investment would answer a need that downtown's business owners say is becoming an increasing problem. More downtown housing stimulates economic growth, said Downtown Pittsfield Inc. Executive Director Cheryl Mirer, and parking volume needs to mirror that progression.

"We are a community of cars. We do not have public transportation," she said. "We need to accommodate our residents, our businesses, our employees. As we grow, our parking needs to grow."

Hinds said he worked with Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier this year to secure \$6 million for the parking project in a bond bill, which he hopes Gov. Charlie Baker will release. If the state doesn't pitch in money soon, Ruffer said, the city will use the \$2 million already allocated to demolish the existing garage and turn it into a surface lot.

Ruffer said the city is supportive of Allegrone's redevelopment plans, and looks forward to working with the company to realize the vision of a walkway connecting residents to a new parking area and to the transit station.

"We have long felt this building is ideally situated for redevelopment," Ruffer said. And now she's happy to see "a serious, community-minded developer acting on the potential."

Public officials agree that the city needs to improve its housing stock in order to attract young professionals to jobs, like those at General Dynamics and Berkshire Health Systems.

Allegrone said Pittsfield is on the rise, and he'll continue looking for smart investments.

"It's a diverse city in the center of the Berkshires, and it has a lot going for it," he said.

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RANK	DRIVER	PV RANK
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2	Kevin Harvick	2
3	Martin Truex Jr	3
4	Kurt Busch	4
5	Clint Bowyer	5

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