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DOWNTOWN LIFE

Ground is Broken on Downtown Development

By The News Herald

City officials, developers and local business leaders grabbed their shovels, threw a little red dirt and broke ground on an impressive economic development project.

Construction has officially begun on the 400 Union Square block, a mixed-use development project along East Union and White streets in downtown Morganton.

The city and members of the Downtown Redevelopment Committee began to envision the block in 1995 after the Planning Committee identified the area as a "blighted area," said Lee Anderson, director of development and design.

More than 70 percent of the property in this area experienced decline, Anderson said.

Armed with this information, the idea of constructing a residential and commercial development was born and the project began to take shape in 1998.

Wilma Parsons, chair of the redevelopment committee, said the project was slated to be the committee's first project, but the bankruptcy of the Premier Mill created a more pressing project to be developed.

Ten individual properties had to be condemned and removed before any work could begin, Parsons said.

This project helps to extend the downtown area, Parsons said. This area of town has not always gotten a lot of attention. I truly believe it's like a field of dreams. If we build it, they will come.

Charlotte-based developers Tim Crawford and Curt Kennington, with Citiline Developers, purchased the roughly four acres of property in April 2004 in order to construct the development.

The first phase of the project, residential and commercial condominiums, is set to be complete by mid- to late summer, Crawford said.

Libby W. Stephens, owner of Walton Realty, said the realty company is excited about playing such a key role in the project.

The master plan of 400 Union Square honors the connection and sense of community that is Morganton by combining the best of small town living in a vibrant and dynamic setting within walking distance to downtown, Stephens said.

Being a lifelong resident of Burke County, today's groundbreaking makes me very proud that we have such a strong city government and people who truly love and care about Morganton, Parsons said. Small towns need that to survive, and I think that's why many small towns die out.

Although multiple and residential units are already under contract, Stephens said there are still several units lefts.

Limited pricing incentives are still available that make living and owning residential or commercial property here very affordable, Stephens said.

For more information about 400 Union Square, call 438-8882 or visit the Sale Center on the corner of East Union and White Street. Sales Center hours are Monday, Tuesday and Friday from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. or by appointment.

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