

Claremont Building Might Be Sold

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Claremont — The Pleasant Street apartment building that was ordered vacated by city officials in March because of numerous safety and code violations may be getting a new life.

Kevin Lacasse, owner of New England Family Housing of New Hampton, N.H., told the City Council he is looking at buying the three-story Goddard Block and investing several million dollars into its rehabilitation.

But whether he moves forward with the project could depend on resolving a parking problem with the Pleasant Street property.

Frank J. Barrett, a White River Junction architect working with Lacasse, said he will ask the Zoning Board of Adjustment in July for a variance to reduce the number of required spaces and will further ask whether city-owned spaces in a lot behind the Goddard building could be used to meet the regulations.

Barrett told the council he is looking to have the required number of spaces reduced from 1½ spaces per unit to 1.

With a plan to create 32 units in the building, an increase of eight from what is there now, Barrett said they would need 32 spaces if the variance is granted. Some of the parking behind the building is part of the Goddard parcel.

“Here is the number we think is reasonable. Here are the 15 we have and we are looking at other sources, including the city,” Barrett said he plans to tell the ZBA.

He told the councilors he was informing them of his plan so it does not come as surprise if the ZBA agrees to have shared spaces on the city's portion of the lot behind the building to meet the parking regulations.

A second variance that Barrett will seek on Lacasse's behalf would allow some residential units on the ground floor in the back of the building. All of the 24 existing living units are on the second and third floors.

The two storefronts in the front of the building would remain, as would the arcade space that runs from the front entrance to the rear entrance.

As far as the condition of the 1926 building, Barrett said structurally it is sound but will need a complete overhaul of the electrical, mechanical and plumbing systems because so much maintenance had been deferred over the years.

"Everything is shot," he said.

Lacasse told the council his company owns the former Latchis Theater building across the street from the Goddard as well as apartment buildings in other parts of the state.

If he moves forward with the Goddard project, Lacasse said he would do a lot more than the minimum to bring it up to code.

"In order for me to be involved, it has to be done right," Lacasse said. "Our plan is to take it down to the studs and start over."

A Community Development Block Grant, affordable housing tax credits from the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority and private capital would be combined to raise the roughly \$4 million to \$5 million Lacasse said would be needed for the renovation.

The council said it supported the project and would do what it could to see it succeed.

"We very much want to see this work," said Mayor Charlene Lovett.