

Progress continues at Lewiston sites (though not all of it is visible)

FRONTIER HOUSE (cont)

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gonna see different things going on at different times. But just be a little more patient, because there's a lot more paperwork and T's we've got to cross and I's we've got to get dotted from government agencies before we can proceed here. And they have time frames that run for them to make decisions and, because of the pandemic, a lot of it's been Zoom stuff and it wasn't really in their office, so it's just taken a little longer."

He added, "As we get each of these sort of things in the queue with these different agencies, we'll be able to give you guys in the village more of a full outline of expectations and time frames and construction schedules."

Paladino added, "As soon as the cold weather pulls away, hopefully in another three, four weeks, we'll be out there again doing work on the exterior of the building."

"In the meantime, we've been working with an architect; we've worked with (the State Historic Preservation Office - SHPO); we've worked with national parks; we've been looking at about 15 other different programs that deal with historically significant structures such as this; talking to different tenancies; and going over different concepts for what we want to do there."

"All this takes time, but a big part of the lag here has been just COVID. You know, for a good six months there, we dropped everything just to concentrate on our core business and keeping everything up and alive. Obviously, I have a lot of hotels in my portfolio and those have been decimated by this pandemic - and a very large financial cost to us. But that being said, hopefully things have stabilized to a point where we are

starting to get into planning when we're going to start the majority of the work on some of these major developments that we do have - Frontier House being one.

"But all along, behind the scenes, yes, there's a ton of what's called 'back-of-the house' paperwork to be done, and things to be submitted. Some, especially with the Frontier House, which is historically significant, until we get SHPO and (State) Parks on board, we don't necessarily want to proceed with any work. Because if we do so, they could - even if they make a recommendation - they can always change their mind if we don't have it in writing."

With regard to concept, the submission that's recently been given to the Village of Lewiston calls for a total of 10 living units spread across the second, third and fourth floors. There's also been talk of incorporating the Lewiston Council on the Arts, and/or a restaurant, on the first floor, to keep that part of the Frontier House open to the public.

"I think all those are options we are reviewing right now (as far as) best fit," Paladino said. "The restaurant is definitely a viable idea that we wanted; unfortunately, every restaurant has just been hammered during this pandemic. So, any decision on that is not to be made in the near future."

"If something else does come along, we have some other ideas, which we are looking at. We might proceed in some different manners."

Executive Director Irene Rykaszewski said the Lewiston Council on the Arts is open-minded and would listen to suggestions from the Village of Lewiston. Currently, the LCA operates out of the "Big Yellow House" on Ridge Street.



Mortar work began in December on the Frontier House.

Before Paladino's group bought the Frontier House, there was a legal issue with the former ownership with regard to the stability of the building.

"It's an old building," he said. "You know, it's old; it's worn; it's seen better days. When moving into buildings like these, there are some significant things, which will need to change, and will need to happen."

"It's not to the point of falling down" as some have speculated, "but, at the end of the day, the big debate has been how much work do you put into it - and what risks you take in further trying to correct some of the current, very-

large deficiencies."

Paladino said a "practical approach" will be implemented, "where we don't think all the deficiencies have to be totally repaired to their original state, in terms of everything plumb, everything level, everything back to normal."

The reason for this, he explained, is that, with older structures, "If you do go try to jack them up or put them back in their original places, you usually cause further damage to the structure itself."

"The best way to do it is usually just stabilize what you got, and work from there."

He said, "At the end of day, the

structure will be stable. It will be functional and operational and it will have a lot of historic character remaining with it" per SHPO standards, "and that's the ultimate thing."

All told, the building is expected to remain closed until 2022.

"I would say that's probably likely - though I think we'll be significantly further ahead by that time," Paladino said. "As we start to move, it's going to get to a point here where it's going to be more process, which is going to dictate our schedule here more than how quickly we want to move or not. We're into that part of the project at this point."

NEW PLAZA

In late 2012, Ellicott Development purchased 756, 784-790 Center St., and adjacent vacant land on Onondaga Street (bordering North Eighth Street). Tenants at that time included The Country Doctor, Grandpaws Pet Emporium and Smith Brothers Pizza.

As project reps worked to find

compromise with the Village Board, those businesses left - and almost five years passed before the structures were demolished and the field was cleared.

Anne Welch was sworn in as mayor in June 2018 and, three months later, ground broke at the three-building plaza site.

Quest Diagnostics (building

No. 2) opened in early 2020, while Tim Hortons (building No. 1) welcomed its first guests in December.

Paladino said it's been difficult to get materials and labor over the course of the pandemic, and that's particularly why the largest structure, building No. 3, remains unfinished.

"Doors and frames are taking three times as long as they used to take to get to site. We've had some issues with a couple of contractors, and we've got some issues with money, on financing," he said. "When we lost all our tenancies originally, we financed this thing out of our own cash. To date, we're probably \$8-\$9 million into it already. But we do finally have financing to finish the project."

"But that really hasn't been what has caused the ultimate delays there. It's more just been talking to some different tenancies."

"There's been a lot of stops and starts. What we need here that's gonna help us, in terms of my whole business, is just for people to be careful; for people to be safe with this pandemic. But for the government to keep things open," Paladino said. "Close, continuous start and stops, has caused us to lose probably three or four dif-

ferent tenancies - again, just because they're like, 'No, I can't go through this. I can't open it and then have them shut everything down again. It's just gonna kill us.'

"The timing is one of the things that we've tried to work with the tenancies now. Things that we know are doing well in this pandemic, if we work with one of those tenancies, we'll try and push them as quickly as we can - like a Quest and a Tim Hortons."

"But other retailers that we're talking to, they're sort of like, 'At this point, we wouldn't want to open anything until the fall, when we think there won't be masks at all and when we can open fully; and we're not at risk of absorbing all our upfront costs and then not be able to recapture any significant revenue in the interim,'" he said.

Paladino noted there isn't a preferred style or grouping of tenants he would want to see in these buildings.

"What I try not to do is put people in there that are just gonna compete with one another. I think that just hurts your plazas," he said. "We have the Tim Hortons in there; that's good; we probably would like to see another restaurant in there. Probably somebody like a sit-down restaurant of some sort, similar to some of the ones

you have in town, like Brickyard. ... We'd like to see something like that. We are talking some different concepts. ... We've had some other smaller (tenant ideas), just like hamburger/hot dog-type place; pizzerias we've talked to. You know, maybe one other person like that. And then definitely some general retail, and then maybe some medical in there also. We are talking to all those different sectors right now."

Paladino said the response from his first two tenants has been favorable.

"Everyone seems happy to date," he said. "I got real positive feedback about the look of everything. I think people are surprised at how it's turned out. I don't think, when they saw it on paper and they saw renderings, they really envisioned what it actually was going to look like, in terms of what it looks like now. That's been a real good positive for us."

"We're just looking forward to really just completing this project and moving on to other stuff. The village lately, in recent years, has been very good to work with. And I think they want to see it completed as quickly as we want to get it completed - and filled up, obviously."

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