

Springfield Report

Continuing a Century-Old Hometown Tradition

October 26, 2016 • Vol. 42 No. 43 • 75¢

Woolson Block Redevelopment Moves Forward with SHA Purchase

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The sale of the Woolson Block from a private owner to the housing authority went through on last week. I spoke with Bill Morlock, the Executive Director of the Springfield Housing Authority, who says that the next step in the redevelopment of the property is finding a limited partner, either a bank or group of investors. This bank or equity fund will have 99% ownership but only limited rights.

Morlock explains that Springfield Housing Unlimited and Housing Vermont are co-general partners. They will see the Woolson Block project through the development. He says that once it is ready, the Housing Authority will manage the property.

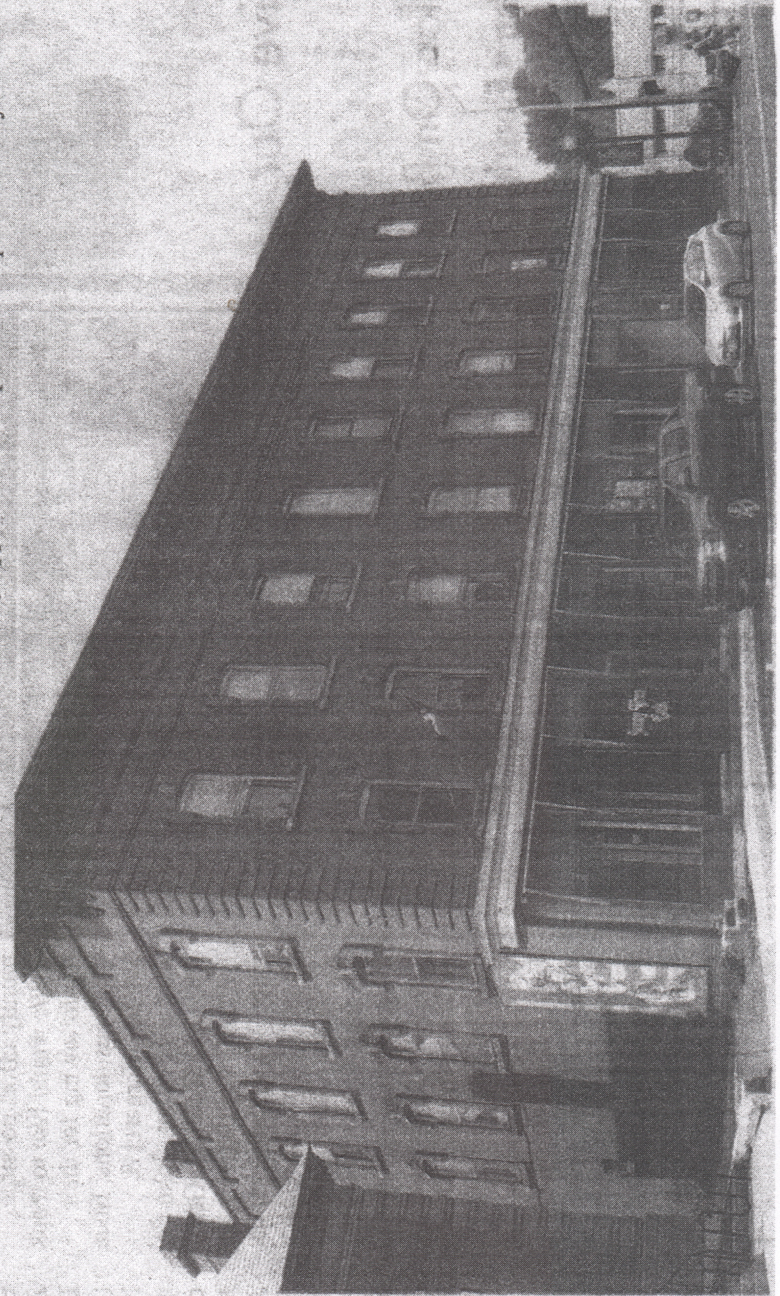
The Springfield Housing Authority has a history of developing properties into residential and com-

mercial use. Morlock is the third Executive Director of the Housing Authority. The first director, Ed Huber, Sr. Street was completed in May of 1972. In the latter part of 1978, the Housing Authority applied to build the Whitcomb Building. It was approved in 1979 and completed in July of 1980.

After Huber left in 1985, Don Martin was hired in mid-1986 and he passed away in 1988. Morlock was hired soon thereafter. Under Morlock's watch, more senior housing, The Maples, was built in 1993. In the mid- to late-1990's Mountain View and Westview were acquired by assuming debt left after the 15 years of tax credits were up.

In 2008, after the fire at the Ellis Block, the owners did not have the money to restore it so they collected the insurance money to pay their debts and they sold the Ellis Block to the Housing Authority and Housing Vermont as co-partners for \$500,000. The

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renovation took place and nine housing units were created.

Morlock says he could not accomplish all that the Housing Authority has accomplished without his amazing support team. He says they are loyal and hard-working and are always included in any hiring process of new employees. His team is involved in the interviews and no one is hired without a consensus among his support team. This, he says, is the key to his well-run office and his ability to work on several major projects such as the Woolson Block purchase, renovation, and management.

Black River Design of Montpelier has been contracted to design the Woolson Block. Morlock says that design plans are only sketches at this point. The 1st draft of the designs is due November 30. Plans for the first round of tax credit funding is due the first part of the year. Morlock says that the project will receive state tax credits and historic tax credits and funding will be sought from the National Trust Fund, a Community Development Block Grant, and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, among others.

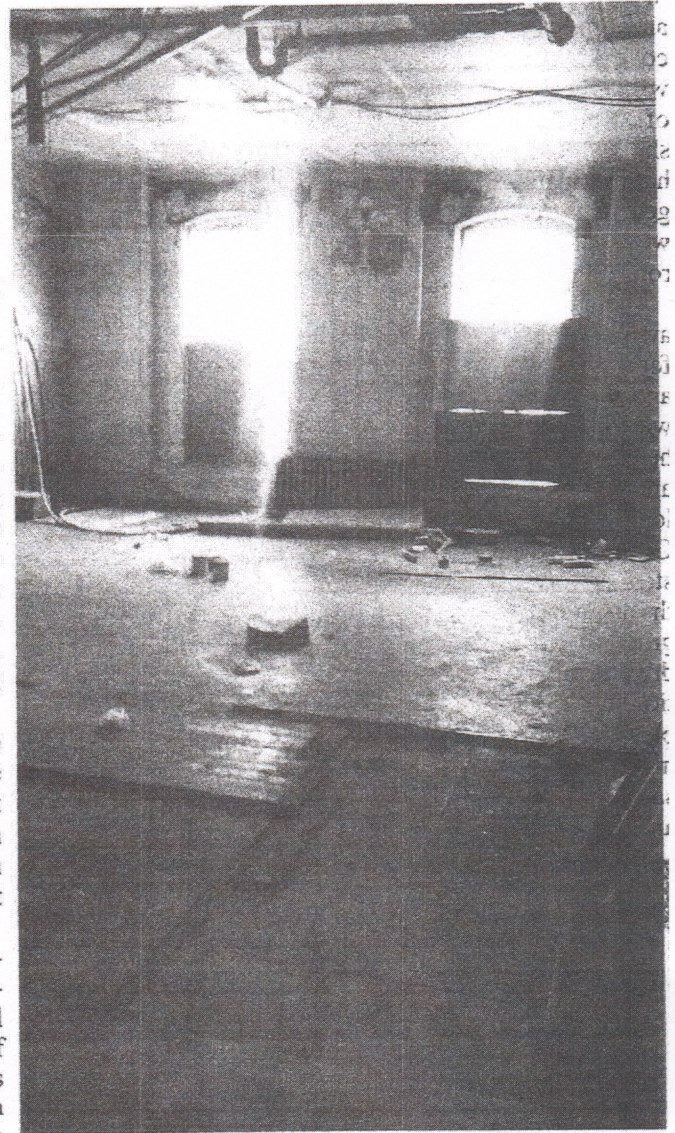
There is a community meeting at the Hartness House on November 10th. Morlock says there may be some sketches or drawings for the community to see at that meeting that will also be introducing the Downtown Plan to the community. Completion of the Woolson Block project is scheduled for the latter part of 2018 but it could be early 2019.

Morlock says that one never knows what will be discovered once the project begins. There will be 16 apartments on the 2nd and 3rd floors and four commercial spaces on the 1st floor. Morlock says that the back of the building is not in good shape and that the bedrock is falling apart. He says that the back section is a wooden addition and will more than likely be torn down and a green space for tenants installed in its place. He says that the commercial space will probably rent for between \$10 - \$12 per square foot. The rents will be competitive with surrounding towns.

Morlock says that out of the 16 apartments, four units of housing will be for youth in transition with a live-in manager and wrap-around services/agencies involved. He understands that there are some in the community who are concerned about "transitional housing" being part of the Woolson Block. Morlock wants to emphasize the following: These will be young adults who show promise and this is one way to make sure their lives go in the right direction and they become productive citizens; There have been 31-40 young people who have been recognized as needing this service; There is a strict screening process; They will be supervised - they will not be just hanging out or around; They will live in this transitional housing for six months and then will move into their own housing in the building or in one of the Housing Authority's other properties.

Their wrap-around services last for a total of two years. This project is modeled on a program in Brattleboro called Brattleboro Youth Services. It has a success rate of 95%.

The rest of the apartments will be offered to people whose income is 60% or less of the median income. A single person has to make \$30,420.00 or less to qualify.



The interior of the Woolson Block

A family has to make \$34,700.00 or less to qualify. Morlock wants to make sure the community realizes that the Springfield Housing Authority will be paying full taxes on the Woolson Block as they do on all of their properties. They want to make sure they contribute to the town and to help with the services in town. He says that the building will always look nice and will be kept up. Morlock says that the Housing Authority has a good reputation in town and people should feel relieved that they will be managing the Woolson Block.

The Italianate style Woolson Block was built in 1868 by Amasa Woolson, Horace W. Thompson and Frederick Parks. The architect was George H. Guernsey. The original Springfield Reporter (established 1878) was in the basement of the Woolson Block.

As many Springfielders know, Springfield has a rich history and its downtown was and should continue to be the hub of the community. As I was standing outside the Woolson Block speaking with Morlock, a gentleman stopped us and shook Morlock's hand and thanked him for taking over the Woolson Block. Morlock invites anyone here in Springfield to take a ride through some of the properties that the Housing Authority owns and or manages. You will find clean, nicely cared for properties. This is what he assures you the Woolson Block will be, as well.