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Plan calls for remake of old button factory in Scranton into counseling center

JIM LOCKWOOD, STAFF WRITER / PUBLISHED: JANUARY 27, 2018

SCRANTON — A developer's sweeping \$10 million plan to relocate the Scranton Counseling Center from the 300 block of Adams Avenue to South Side, and afterward revamp the center's vacated buildings downtown, received another \$1 million state grant.

The project by Charles Jefferson of Jefferson-Werner LLC calls for renovating a vacant, former button factory on Cedar Avenue at Cherry Street in South Side, and moving the Scranton Counseling Center there from its current pair of unconnected buildings on Adams Avenue.

"They'll move over into a finished project," Jefferson said of the counseling center.

After that agency exits Adams Avenue, Jefferson then would commercially redevelop the vacated buildings.

"I'm really excited about it because it's a cool block, right off Courthouse Square, the proximity to the U (University of Scranton)," Jefferson said, adding that it's a natural fit for

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JIM LOCKWOOD / STAFF PHOTO Scranton Counseling Center in 300 block of Adams Avenue in Scranton.



JIM LOCKWOOD / STAFF PHOTO Former Scranton Button Co. building on Cedar Avenue at Cherry Street in South Scranton.



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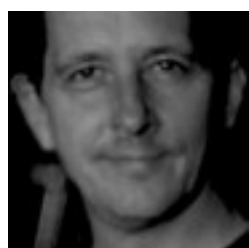


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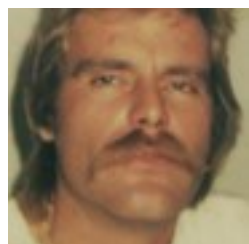
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his developments.

His properties and projects in Scranton include the rehabilitated Connell Lofts building, the Mulberry 426 building, Montage Mountain Resorts and the Leonard Theater, also in the 300 block of Adams Avenue, across from the counseling center.

Jefferson said he hopes to get renovations of

the former button factory started this year and completed in the first half of 2019. A different, for-profit firm of Jefferson, Scranton-Cherry LP, would own the project and lease space in the South Side building to the counseling center, according to the grant application.

Established in 1947, the private, nonprofit counseling center occupied a former Sears building and an unconnected building two doors away on Adams Avenue for about 30 years. An unrelated vacant, blighted building separates the center's buildings.

Having served nearly 10,000 people in 2016, the behavioral health services agency occupies a "30-year-old, tired renovation" of a department store that is now inadequate, and relocation to a revamped building would better serve clients and employees, the grant application says.

Meanwhile, downtown growth, including from the University of Scranton and Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, helped make Adams Avenue a "major arterial road," according to the application. The center's loading and unloading of medical-transport clients creates traffic congestion, and a modernized facility in South Side would offer ample parking and transport room there, the application says.

Efforts to contact Scranton Counseling Center Executive Director Edward Heffron were unsuccessful.

In the works for a few years, the renovation/relocation plan received an initial \$1 million state grant in late 2016, and last month garnered a second \$1 million grant, both from the state Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program.

The city, acting as a pass-through entity for the funds, approved the first grant in September, and is now enacting the second grant. On Monday, city council introduced legislation from Mayor Bill Courtright authorizing the city to accept and disburse the second \$1 million grant. This resolution will come up for adoption at council's meeting Monday at 6 p.m. at City Hall.

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