



Two Scranton redevelopment projects get \$2.8M in state grants

JIM LOCKWOOD, STAFF WRITER / PUBLISHED: JUNE 2, 2018

SCRANTON — A pair of redevelopment projects in the city got a big boost from \$2.8 million in state grants.

The grants, from the state Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP), include:

- \$2 million for developer Charles Jefferson's sweeping plan to relocate the Scranton Counseling Center from the 300 block of Adams Avenue downtown to a former button factory in South Scranton.
- \$800,000 for Jefferson's renovation of the former Samter's building at Penn and Lackawanna avenues downtown into apartments and retail space.

RACP has been a main driver of downtown economic development and community improvement in the region over the past several years under Gov. Tom Wolf, state Sen. John Blake, D-22, Archbald, said in announcing the grants.

The funding "leverages significant private investment to grow our regional economy and continue the revitalization of downtown Scranton into a hub for small business,

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higher education and downtown living," Blake said.

RACP is a grant program administered by the Governor's Office of the Budget for the acquisition and construction of regional economic, cultural, civic and community development improvement projects. The program requires a dollar-for-dollar match in non-state funding in the project, and all project-related expenses must be incurred and satisfied in advance of approved reimbursements from the state.

The two large-scale redevelopments bolster city revitalization efforts, Blake said.

"These two projects are critically important to the continued transformation of our downtown business district," Blake said. "The relocation of the Scranton Counseling Center will open for development a large area in our downtown business district, and the repurposing of the Samter's building fills the growing demand for modern and affordable downtown living."

The counseling center/button factory project previously received \$1 million RACP grants in each of 2016 and 2017, Blake said. With the additional \$2 million, Jefferson hopes to now get that \$10 million project underway in the fall and completed in about nine months. He and the city, which acts as a pass-through entity for the state grants, had been seeking the RACP funding for the past few years for the counseling center project. Word of the latest \$2 million came as a nice surprise this week, Jefferson said.

"Sometimes, you've just got to stay the course. The faith that the governor has in this shows that staying the course pays off," Jefferson said in a phone interview.

The two-pronged counseling center project by one of firms, Jefferson-Werner LLC, calls for first renovating a vacant, 108,000-square-foot 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 in the 300 block of Adams Avenue.

A different Jefferson firm, Scranton-Cherry LP, would own this project and lease space in the South Side building to the counseling center, a grant application said.

Established in 1947, the private, nonprofit counseling center has 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.

After the counseling center relocates to a renovated button factory, Jefferson would revamp the center's vacated buildings on Adams Avenue. He envisions retail space on the ground level and residences on upper floors.

"It's a great project. It's a great thing for the downtown and the counseling center," Jefferson said. "We will do a great job for them, and the new facility (in South Side) will serve them for years to come."



Original Woodstock festival site announces plans for 50th anniversary event at Bethel Woods

A 50th anniversary remembrance of the original Woodstock festival –the cultural touchstone moment that brought an estimated half-million people to a hillside in Bethel, N.Y., for a legendary three-day music festival – will be held at the original site, organizers announced Thursday. (read more)



100 Years Ago - City Council says no to firefighter's wage increase

After an hourlong meeting between city council, Mayor Alex Connell and the union representing the Scranton firefighters, council President Thomas Saville told the union, "We made it very plain at the last meeting that the wage question was closed and we absolutely refuse to open the budget again. (read more)



Meanwhile, the renovation of the vacant, five-story Samter's building into 24 apartments on upper floors and retail space on the first floor has been underway and nearing completion expected in August. Ten of the 24 apartments are leased so far in the century-old building now called Samters Lofts.

Built as the Samter's clothing store for men and boys, it closed in 1977. The building later contained state government offices but had been empty for years. Another Jefferson company, Scranton-Samter LP, bought the 43,712-square-foot Samter's building for \$500,000 in December 2016.

The Sweet Lush Cupcakery of Dunmore was going to be a commercial tenant, but that arrangement did not pan out, Jefferson said. He is talking with two other unidentified commercial tenants, but agreements are not nailed down yet, he said.

Jefferson's other 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.

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