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Crane Street building project gets grant for its affordable housing  
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SOUTHBRIDGE — Wrapped in silver like a shiny birthday present, the three-story building on Crane Street will soon be filled with several surprises.

A bar, a bakery, three office spaces, a restaurant, seven working artist studios and a large entertainment and auction area — these are just some of the plans for the building, which is currently under redevelopment by co-owners Gabriel McCarthy and Rod Murphy.

The historic building, which has at different times served as a food storage facility, a dog food plant and plumbing supply offices, is being transformed, inch by inch, into a large multi-use building, complete with commercial, artistic and residential spaces.

In fact, the residential space, which will eventually be located on the third floor, just received a \$465,685 award from the state to turn the 1,300-square-foot units into at least three handicapped accessible and affordable two-bedroom apartments.

"It's wonderful. We were hoping that it would happen," Murphy said about the news of the grant money. "We had a lot of help from [Director of the Economic Development and Planning] Sandy Acly and the Town Council and town manager."

The state Department of Housing and Community Development will administer the money through its Housing Development Support Program. The DHCD estimates that the redevelopment will create about 30 new jobs inside the building.

Last fall, the Town Council voted to apply for the funds through Acly's department. It was the first time the town has applied for this specific grant.

"It's a pretty exciting project, a very worthy project," Acly said. "There's already a lot going on down there."

Town Manager Clayton Carlisle agreed.

"It's a wonderful housing opportunity because of the location in the central heart of town," he said, adding that this project will help move the town toward its goal of



Rachel Montross photo The shiny silver exterior of the Cannery Building on Crane Street catches a few rays of sun yesterday afternoon.  
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providing all residents with safe and decent housing.

Once the apartments are built, residents will have a chance to apply for the units through the town. The owners of the building will choose their tenants.

Yesterday afternoon, construction workers hammered and swept sawdust covered floors inside the building.

McCarthy gave a tour of the spacious facility, pointing out the soon-to-be bar and restaurant areas, retail stores and bright artist galleries. Downstairs, a green and blue mural painting hung inside a cozy bar that was inspired by a similar watering hole that McCarthy has visited in Edinburgh.

"This is the last thing," McCarthy said as he stepped through a door into a cavernous space. Here, he explained, would be a stage for entertainment and antique auctions, a place to listen to jazz bands and enjoy a beer from the building's own microbrewery, to be named "Honest Town Brewery."

McCarthy stepped outside and described how the future landscape design would incorporate the green woods and the blue waters of the neighboring Quinebaug River.

Inside, business owners Anne Renaud-Jones and state Representative Mark J. Carron, who have set up shop on the first floor of the Cannery, expressed their enthusiasm about the building.

"It's a very exciting space," Renaud-Jones said.

"This spot is perfect," Carron agreed. Carron and Renaud-Jones actually moved their direct mail business into the building a year ago — before bathrooms, air conditioning or heat arrived.

"It was a very long winter," Renaud-Jones said, smiling.

Carron described many benefits of the building, including its proximity to the future Quinebaug Valley Recreational Trail.

The building has also been designed to be environmentally friendly and energy efficient, Carron said, which will help its residents maintain lower energy bills.

McCarthy's wife, Margaret Morrissey, is a champion of the building's future artistic space as well as the renovation of building.

"Once again, another historic building has been saved," said Morrissey, who is the chairman of the Historical Commission and adult services librarian at the Jacob Edwards Public Library. "It's a way of ensuring its former purpose, a return to its former glories."

No one wanted to pin an exact date for the completion of the redevelopment project, which has been going on for about a year. But at the rate construction is going, Murphy estimated, that the residential units should be completed within a year.

When it is complete, residents and employees and artists will live and work, side by side.

"One aspect helps another," McCarthy said. "Wherever you have shops, it makes a community."

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