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Mass. firm plans 'affordable' condos in Woonsocket

**64 units expected to sell
for \$140,000 to \$200,000**

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Around the city of Woonsocket, developer Brian Kelleher sees vibrancy. It comes from the new commercial and residential development. It also comes from the first-rate jazz club and the new restaurants in the bustling downtown area.

In fact, he said, it's starting to look like a renaissance in the city.

And with a new project, Kelleher will get a chance to add to that vibrancy and bring a major portion of the city's planned residential development to the table.

The Lofts at Allen Street, a planned condominium complex in downtown Woonsocket that will account for more than two-thirds of the area's planned residential development, kicked off last month.

The \$10 million project, developed by North Reading, Mass., firm The Aspen Group, will add 64 residential units to Woonsocket by rehabbing two historic mills and erecting one new building, said Kelleher, who is the principal of the firm.

The units, which will come on line in three phases, are slated to sell for between \$140,000 and \$200,000. According to project architect Hans D. Strauch, principal of HDS Architecture, in Watertown, Mass., the one-bedroom units will be about 800 square feet and the two-bedroom units will be about 1,200 square feet, he said.

The project, which sits along the Blackstone River, encompasses two former mills - the 42,000-square-foot former Sydney Worsted Co. Mill built in 1910, and the 18,000-square-foot former E.P. Herbert Knitting Mill, built in 1922.

The first portion of the project, called the Canal House, will be at the Herbert Knitting mill. The rehabilitated two-story building will include 16 one- and two-

bedroom units. Kelleher said he anticipates the first phase to be completed this fall.

The second phase, slated to be completed in the first quarter of 2007, is called The Landing and will be at the Sydney Worsted mill. The building, which is the largest structure on the site, at 40,000 square feet, will house 36 residential units made up of studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom units.

The third portion of The Lofts, slated to be finished by the end of 2007, will be a newly constructed building. Called the Gate House, the new structure will consist of 12 one- and two-bedroom units.

Strauch said the new building will not be made to replicate the existing structures on the site. However, it will fit into the project and "echo" the existing buildings, he said.

Two buildings on the site will be razed because they were beyond repair. However, Strauch said, the developer managed to save the two most "historically significant" mill buildings.

"We will be celebrating the beauty of the worthy ones and the others will be removed and made way for public space, green space and parking," Strauch said.

While projects rehabilitating old mill buildings are generally more difficult than constructing a new unit from scratch. Strauch said the two buildings afford the firm some interesting opportunities, includ-



THE LOFTS at Allen Street, a condo complex being built in downtown Woonsocket, will include 64 units in two rehabbed mills and one new building.

ing good uses of natural light. The mills had been spacious, with many windows.

"Our challenge is to make lemonade out of a lemon," he said. "and we have done that here."

Kelleher said the firm became interested in northern Rhode Island several years ago. As a firm based near Boston, Aspen saw the area - and Woonsocket, in particular - as a good place to develop affordable housing.

"With the price of housing escalating everywhere, we were looking for areas where we could deliver quality housing at a lower cost," Kelleher said, "Woonsocket seemed to be a fit for us."

Jeff Polucha, Woonsocket's director of economic development, said that the residential developments such as The Lofts represent a major part of the city's redevelopment efforts. Many of the projects, including The Aspen Group's, will be within walking distance, of the downtown commercial district.

"It's part of the creation of a new neighborhood in the downtown district, which is a tremendous opportunity for us to rebuild our downtown," Polucha said.