

Projects could boost Waynesburg's business district

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Jim McNutt/Observer-Reporter Exterior of the Observer-Reporter building in Washington.

Two projects got started last week that will positively impact the downtown Waynesburg business district.

One was the start of construction by the First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Greene County on a new building next to its home office at 25 E. High St. The other was demolition work by the Greene County Redevelopment Authority on the century-old J.H. Ganiear Building at 146 E. High St. The demolition work is aimed at preserving and eventually restoring part of the building.

Both projects are important in the effort to maintain and develop a healthy and more vibrant business district.

In the last five years or so, it has been hard to gauge which direction Waynesburg's downtown might be heading. In that time, four buildings have been razed, leaving vacant lots that could leave the impression that Waynesburg is in the midst of a slow, inexorable decline.

First, two buildings that housed the former Colonial Bar, Lam's Garden restaurant and Hudson's Jewelers were razed in 2011.

Then, in 2013, the Allison Building was razed, with the People's National Bank Building, once Waynesburg's tallest building, coming down the next year.

In each case, the buildings were in dilapidated condition and would have been far too costly to rehabilitate.

Despite the gauzy nostalgia that might have surrounded these structures, their demolition was necessary in order to pave the way for buildings that will be more economically viable and better serve the community.

Early last week, a contractor began excavating the site for First Federal's new building. Though we haven't seen an architectural rendering yet, a bank official earlier said plans were to construct a building that would resemble as much as possible the one that used to stand there.

Meanwhile, the Allison Building was said to be one of the oldest structures in downtown Waynesburg and had some local historical significance since it was considered to be the birthplace of Waynesburg's Rain Day.

We also should note the new building will be the first to be constructed downtown in many years.

Demolition work also got started last week on the J.H. Ganiear Building. The redevelopment authority, purchased it in a judicial sale for \$4,500, and is demolishing the two sections in the rear of the building. It hopes to restore the most important section, which faces High Street.

After the demolition work is completed, the authority plans to put a new roof on the building to prevent further damage from the weather until it can be restored. The demolition work is being completed with state grant money. The authority has not yet determined how it will proceed with the restoration, which is expected to be costly.

In any case, the project is important in that it will prevent another building in downtown from facing the wrecking ball and fading into history.

As we noted, both projects should be viewed as positive developments for Waynesburg's downtown. Both First Federal and the Greene County Redevelopment Authority should be commended for their investments in the community and their efforts to help keep the business district alive.

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