

Grants boost Troy's revival

State funds aid Center of Gravity, Waterfront Farmers' Market plans

By Eric Anderson

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Troy

Two state grants are helping fund projects that could play key roles in downtown Troy's ongoing revival.

The funding, from Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Regional Council initiative, provided \$550,000 last year to the Tech Valley Center of Gravity and \$1.5 million this year to the developer of a permanent home for the Troy Waterfront Farmers' Market.

Work on the new home for the Center of Gravity, a makerspace for tinkers, inventors and entrepreneurs that provides access to sophisticated and expensive equipment, is under way at the Quackenbush Building, formerly the home of Rite Aid and W.T. Grant.

A heavily remodeled storefront is being restored to its original appearance, while interior improvements are being made for tenants and for the organization's equipment and workspaces.

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"We'll probably be moving in fully in March," said Laban Coblentz, founder and board chairman of the Center of Gravity.

The new building, in conjunction with Hudson Valley Community College, will be a START-UP NY location, he said, offering various tax breaks to companies that qualify.

"We've got multiple companies in the application process," Coblentz said. "We've had inquiries from other landlords who have said, 'We love what you're doing with the Center of Gravity — would you be willing to add other spaces?'"

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Because the Quackenbush is almost booked up, Coblentz said, he anticipates that participating startups will need the additional spaces.

Less than two blocks to the west, the Troy Waterfront Farmers' Market is in the planning stages for its permanent home, part of a residential and commercial project on the site of Troy's former City Hall at Monument Square, which opened in the mid-1970s and was demolished at the end of 2010.

The project received \$1.5 million this year through the Regional Council initiative toward the \$2.8 million market project.

"We're over the moon to have gotten that much from the state," said Seth Jacobs, board president of the Troy Waterfront Farmers' Market. "It should help convince other donors that we're serious."

The permanent market space, on the ground floor of a multi-story building with several floors of apartments above it, will occupy between 14,000 and 17,000 square feet, Jacobs said. Plans include a commercial kitchen, bathrooms and refrigerated storage space. Doors on both the street and river sides of the building will open like garage doors, he said, allowing the market vendors to spill out onto the sizable deck overlooking the river and to the street during the warmer months.

"It's very accessible to both the street and the river," Jacobs said. "This is going to be a real resource for the community."

Currently, the market assembles outdoors around Monument Square and on River Street under small tents during the warmer months, and inside the Troy Atrium on Third Street in the colder months.

While the atrium has been "great" for the market, Jacobs said, the permanent location will allow the organization to host workshops, conferences and events such as garlic festivals and craft beer festivals.

"Some vendors are already planning a permanent presence in the building," he added. "We're going to design it so it can be expanded if needed."

He hopes to collaborate with Capital Roots, the former Capital District Community Gardens, which recently opened a new headquarters and distribution facility a little more than a mile north on River Street.

While there's been little activity since the demolition of Troy's city hall, a job completed in 2011, Jacobs expects "we'll be breaking ground in the spring."

The project is being undertaken by Troy-based Sequence Development.

Construction, Jacobs estimates, will take a little more than a year.

"It's possible in 2016 that we'll be moving in," he said.

The farmers group still needs to raise the additional funds for the new market, he said.

But like other markets in such cities as Seattle and Olympia, Wash.; Kansas City, and Halifax, Nova Scotia, he expects this will become a downtown asset.

Already, Jacobs points out, the weekly farmers market attracts from 4,000 to 8,000 people each Saturday.

The market will be "a great example of ... downtown community development," Jacobs said.

eanderson@timesunion.com • 518-454-5323