

## Decisions, decisions ...

### Developers seek input on next Buhrman-Pharr phase

Story by Aaron Brand

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With the popularity of the first 40 lofts at the Buhrman-Pharr apartment complex evident in the first six months of opening, the owner and developer for the project are mulling ideas for the next phase.

And they'd like to talk with the Texarkana community about that.

Charles Deville Jr., executive director of Buhrman-Pharr owner Family Service Agency, said a community forum will be held in late August to gather input on what Texarkana residents would like to see with the downtown project at Laurel and Third streets.

"I'd like to get the beginnings of a plan on what we'll end up doing for the next stage of development," said Deville, who desires the forum to be interactive and conversational.

Several possibilities are under consideration for the second building in the Buhrman-Pharr block, something Deville would like to explain and discuss with the community. Residential use could be one of the options for the building, which once housed the Buhrman-Pharr retail store.

Old stock bins still line some of the passageways, markers of the prominence the business maintained for many years downtown. Other remnants of the building's former glory remain, such as the old sprinkler system Deville wants repaired.

But looking ahead, there are a world of possibilities, such as selling the second building if the right price and right plan comes along.

"We could do another tax credit deal," he said about the potential for more affordable housing.

"Our approach was, number one, to get this place stabilized," said Deville about the plan they had for the first phase. He emphasized that as a nonprofit organization they don't have deep pockets.

The popularity of the first building, though, was a surprise. "We leased up much faster than we'd originally planned," said Deville. He said the response from the community has been completely positive. He said some loft residents, discussing what they'd like to see at Buhrman-Pharr in the future, fancy the idea of some sort of commercial use.

A third multistory building, which served as a warehouse years ago and now stores old auditorium seats, has the layout Deville believes would be ripe for more traditional, open-floor plan lofts.

He thinks a mix of commercial and condo space could also be in the cards for subsequent phases. "But it's also the riskiest proposition," said Deville, explaining that when developing affordable housing they're somewhat bound in the return on their investment.



Charles Deville, executive director of the Family Service Agency, discusses the next phase of the Buhrman-Pharr development while standing next to a row of bins in one corridor of a building that used to house the retail store.

However, with this potential for mixed use, he sees the whole Buhrman-Pharr complex as special. "It would be unique in terms of being a whole community as a whole city block," said Deville.

Richard Reynolds, whose Reynolds Realty Management is the real estate agency for the property, said the pieces of the Buhrman-Pharr puzzle are coming together. He said the interest in loft living for the first phase, which opened earlier this year, is a testimonial to what can happen with the right product in the right place.

He said that's a good indication that a lease development is a good direction, but they have talked about selling and leasing condo space. He said they are in an exploration stage.

"I think that once downtown gets more of a residential life you will start seeing other elements that would support residential life down there ... that just kind of comes with the territory," said Reynolds.

He said Reynolds Realty Management is on its ninth property to sell downtown in the last two years. Yael West and Michael Ruffin at First Security Vanadis, developer for the project, agree there are a number of opinions to consider for the property's future.

West said condos would have to be financed differently than the first phase and it's possible buildings two and three could be developed at the same time. She said high construction costs are one thing to consider, too, when thinking about which way to go. "We do want to do something with those buildings soon because the demand is there," said West.

Ruffin, a financial analyst at Vanadis, said they're going to be open to what they hear from the market. He said they're in the analysis stage now and have done some preliminary design layouts for different residential possibilities.

"The demand is strong in any direction we want to go," said Ruffin, adding the community has been a crucial part of the first phase's success. The community forum will take place from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Aug. 28 at the Tex-Ark Antique Auto Museum across from Buhrman-Pharr on Laurel Street.

The public is invited to attend and learn more about the project and share ideas, and people who'd like to get a tour of the buildings are encouraged to come earlier.

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An old sprinkler system in one building may be repaired and reused for the future development at Buhrman-Pharr. Various tools may now collect dust in a Buhrman-Pharr building, but they're a reminder of the past and indicate what the future may hold. This open space, above, may be used for open-floor residential lofts or perhaps a commercially oriented business venture at Buhrman-Pharr's third building.