

The Winsted Citizen



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LITCHFIELD COUNTY & BEYOND

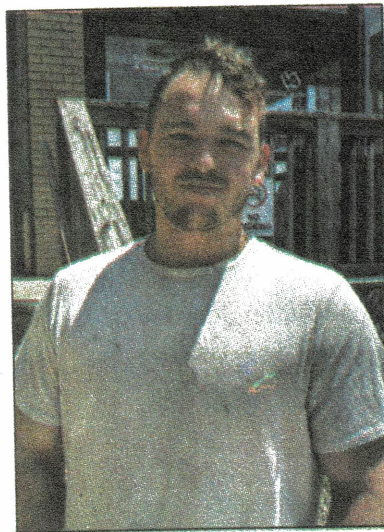
40 Housing Units, Job Training Plan For Vets, Public

By **KATHY MEGAN**

WINSTED – Winsted Health Center has proposed a sweeping transformation of the former Spencer Street hospital campus into a complex that would serve veterans and the public, including affordable housing and entrepreneurial training.

The project, which does not have a price tag yet but has received a \$438,750 state grant for planning, would also include the renovation and expansion of the Veterans Administration Health Clinic, one of the few services remaining at the hillside site.

On a sunny day last month, Vincent Ferrante of Winsted, a 25-year-old Army veteran, who was leaving the V.A. Clinic at 15 Spencer St., said he thinks that affordable housing and



Photograph by Kathy Megan

VINCENT FERRANTE

work development training are needed by veterans.

Ferrante said he is planning to go back in the service because

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Veterans

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he can't afford the rising rents in the area with the money he earns in entry level jobs.

He hopes one day to go back to school using his G.I. benefits to get training in software development or cybersecurity.

But right now, he said, "I don't want to have to worry about finding a job that covers the expenses."

Since the departure of Charlotte Hungerford Hospital in 2021, the five-story hospital structure built in 1957 has been largely vacant. Adjacent to it, the iconic yellow brick original hospital building, constructed in 1902, houses some physician's offices and a physical therapy office.

Vance Taylor, a Torrington commercial real estate agent on the Winsted Health Center's development team, said that over many months the team came up with the idea of "a veterans' community where they could live well through housing, stay well through health care and work well through the entrepreneurial center. ... A wellness center, in all respects of the word."

Josh Kelly, Winchester town manager, said the project would be very helpful for the community.

"I would love to see it come to life," Kelly said.

At the state Department of Veterans Affairs, Joseph Dan-ao, deputy commissioner, said that anytime a collaborative approach is involved among

veteran caregivers and service providers, "veterans and their families are certainly served better."

The project calls for the transformation of the 70,000-square foot former hospital space into 40 units of affordable housing that would be open to the public but with priority given to veterans. Neighborhood Housing Services of Waterbury is the co-developer on the plan.

The health center will also partner with Northwestern Community College's Entrepreneurial Center to create a workforce development and training center with an entrepreneurial program and "maker space," including a metal shop, wood working machines and advanced technologies. This program also would be open to the public but with priority on veterans.

In addition, the project would include the renovation and expansion of the Veterans Administration Clinic at the health center "It's kind of a collaborative 'live well, work well, be well campus,'" said Winsted Health Center CEO Kris Griffin. "That's kind of the tagline we've been using."

The project will include a kitchen for classes and catering and a large events space that can be rented, as well as a non-denominational chapel and a rooftop garden with umbrellas, tables and chairs.

In December, the proposal received \$438,750 from the state's Community Investment Fund to start planning which is now well under way with the architectural



Photographs by Bob Thiesfield

VFW members Leah and Dan Ward, top, VFW Commander Daniel Matthews, bottom right.

firm, Schadler Selnau Associates of Farmington.

No estimate of final cost is yet available, Griffin said. She said she expects that this summer, they will seek various permits needed from the town to proceed.

"We've hit the ground running with it and we hope to keep up the momentum," Griffin said, "so that in a few years, we have a beautiful campus with a lot to offer the community."

Griffin said that in the fall, the development team will have

the second of three community meetings to get feedback on the project.

In October, Griffin said the development team expects to submit a second application for additional funding from the Community Investment Fund to obtain funds with the hope of starting construction in the next couple of years.

Daniel Matthews, commander of the VFW-Winsted Post, said he's sure the VFW would support the project.

Matthews, who spent 17 years in the Marine Corps reserves, said he thinks the project would be "great for the community" and is "direly needed."

Sean Barry, also a member of the VFW in Winsted, said he thinks the project would work well, "especially housing because a lot of veterans are having a hard time dealing with the spoils of war."

"Anything that can help veterans is a good program to invest in," said Barry who was a firefighter for the Air Force and had five deployments from 1992 to 2002. "They pretty much put it all on the line for our country."

Leah Ward, who was a nurse with the Air Force reserve and is now a nurse practitioner, said she often has vets asking her about resources available.

"Now I'll have more resources to point them toward," she said.

Her husband, Dan Ward, who was a combat engineer in the Marines Corps and is quartermaster of the VFW in Winsted, said he thinks that veterans can use all the help available to them.