



## Bresee's facade removal planned

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July 23, 2009 04:00 am

ONEONTA \_ Many Oneonta residents could soon see the original facade of the former Bresee's Department Store for the first time.

And those who remember it will see it again after 50 years.

Otsego County Development Corporation is preparing to go to bid for the removal of the aluminum covering that has hidden the brick face of the Main Street complex since 1959. The aluminum facade was billed by Bresee's at the time of its installation as a "new, progressive look."

"We are hoping to commence the removal process sometime shortly after Sept. 1," Mayor John Nader said Wednesday.

The facade removal is an early stage of a long-planned redevelopment of the former Bresee's into commercial and residential space, Nader said.

For much of the last century, Bresee's was a focal point of commercial and social life in the Oneonta area.

Katherine Angell, 85, of Oneonta, said there will probably be a few nostalgic tears when the original facade of Bresee's is revealed after five decades.

"It was a part of everybody's life," said Angell, who worked in the fabric department.

Angell said the family-owned department store would run promotions and have special displays, especially around Christmas. Thursday nights were important in downtown Oneonta, particularly at Bresee's, because that was payday for the railroad workers, she said.

"It was a meeting place for people," Angell said. "Now that it is gone, you realize what we had."

The 75,000-square-foot complex at 155-161 Main St. has sat largely vacant for more than 10 years, and has significant roof damage and other structural problems.

The complex's former owner, Maurice Ramos, donated it in 2007 to the National Emergency Medicine Association, a nonprofit medical-education organization, in exchange for a tax break. The city is leasing the complex from OCDC for \$1 a year after city and OCDC officials engineered a transfer-of-title agreement with NEMA.

OCDC is the county's oldest nonprofit economic development organization. It is administrated by Carolyn Lewis, the county's economic developer.

Lewis said Monday that the bid would likely be awarded by OCDC in late August.

The construction itself would last about four weeks, she said.

Naders said it appears there will not be a closure of Main Street during construction. However, he said, the sidewalk in front of the complex will need to be closed and a detour established for pedestrians.

The redevelopment plans involve tearing down about one-third of the existing complex \_ which was built in stages over several decades beginning more than 100 years ago.

The project has an estimated cost of about \$6 million, and the leading options include the creation of between 20 and 30 apartments on the first, second or third floors, according to Bloomfield/Schon, the firm hired last year by OCDC to do the renovation work.

Some of the space created would be used for parking, and the city is also considering changes to the Wall Street area behind the complex.

About \$70,000 has been spent on the complex for engineering studies and work to shore up the building, Lewis said. All of it is reimbursable through a state City-by-City grant previously awarded for the project.

Lewis said there shouldn't be any surprise when the facade is removed because of the engineering work done in anticipation of this stage.

"There's a pretty good idea of what's underneath it," Lewis said.

She said it is unclear what will be done with the aluminum siding once it is off the building.

Nader said the economic climate has slowed the pace of the project, but it is still on track, although there is no completion date set.

"We continue to work on this every day," Nader said. "We want to show that there is some progress."

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Photos



The former Bresee-s Department Store is seen Wednesday on Main Street in Oneonta. (Star photo by Julie Lewis)