



## City gets \$2.2M for ex-Bresee's project

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ONEONTA \_ The city's plans to rebuild the former Bresee's building downtown were boosted by a \$2.2 million state grant announced Wednesday.

``We're ecstatic," Mayor John Nader said during a media conference at City Hall late Wednesday afternoon. ``This is something of a coup for a city this size."

The funding was among Restore New York Communities Initiative awards announced by Gov. David Paterson, and the Empire State Development Corp. Awards to 79 projects in the third round of funding totaled \$153.6 million.

The \$7.6 million Bresee Block Redevelopment Project includes demolition of more than 50,000 square feet of vacant, dilapidated buildings and restoring the century-old facade. Plans are to create 13,000 square feet of retail and commercial space, 20 housing units and parking for 75 cars; and to revitalize sections of Wall and Dietz streets.

The city has already received about \$2 million from the state City-by-City and Capital Assistance programs, and other resources include about \$1.5 million in private equity; Community Development Block funds; tax credits sales; and city funds and in-kind services. City officials said the Restore New York grant completes funding for the project.

``It allows us to envision what this project will really be," Nader said. ``This is a great day."

State Sen. James Seward, R-Milford, applauded funding for Oneonta and other area projects through the Restore New York program, an initiative developed in 2006 with the intent to rehabilitate and refurbish buildings in communities across the state.

"Governor Pataki and the Legislature came up with the concept so that we could direct state dollars to downtown areas in particular in order to help local communities restore buildings and return them to usefulness," Seward said in a media release. ``The result will be improved communities and a broader tax base."

In Oneonta, the 75,000-square-foot complex at 155-161 Main St. has been mostly vacant for more than 10 years. For decades in the last century, Bresee's Oneonta Department Store was a retail anchor on Main Street. The family-owned and operated store opened on Main Street in Oneonta in 1899 and closed in 1994.

The complex's subsequent 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.

City officials said they hope the renovated Bresee's Block will become an anchor for downtown.

“The impact of this project cannot be understated,” said Joseph Bernier, Oneonta community development director.

“This unique project now includes the overall redevelopment of not only Bresee's, but the entire Wall Street area,” Bernier said in a media release. “Most importantly, the project will enhance the restored 1906-era rear facades and carriage house of the original Bresee's building – a major feature of the proposed redevelopment project.”

The complex has significant roof damage and other structural problems and, Nader said, in early 2007 was about “to fall in on itself.” The restored space “will never be the Bresee's we grew up with,” he said, but the space can be well-used.

Carolyn Lewis, Otsego County economic developer, said the governor's office has “shown a real understanding of the need of New York's small cities.”

The city originally had applied for \$2.5 million from the Restore NY program. City officials said they will meet with the developer and financing representatives to review details of the project.

The city's Bresee Block Renovation is among several projects downtown. The Foothills Performing Arts Center is building a theater on Market Street, and plans to re-open the Oneonta Theatre on Chestnut Street were announced Wednesday. City officials also noted the revitalization of Water Street and the opening of the Clarion Hotel and Conference Center in recent years.

Lewis, OCDC administrator, said if plans go well, the Bresee Block could be occupied and open for business in mid- to late 2011. The facade on the front of the building will be removed this autumn, she said, and the next six months will be spent completing financing and tax-credit packages. Demolition work could be scheduled next summer, she said.

“By coupling this award with the previous grants,” Lewis said in a prepared statement, “we will be able to improve Oneonta's downtown even in this challenging economic environment.”

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