

'Center at High Falls' Switching Gears

by Leah George
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The Duffy administration is taking High Falls in a new direction.

The failed entertainment district is slowly being transformed into an urban village.

The mostly vacant 'Center at High Falls' building may be the next piece in the administrations plan.

"As soon as we took over this building I can't tell you how many calls I've gotten where people want to rent it out for events; weddings, corporate events, that type of thing," Susan Lindsay, High Falls Manager for the City's Economic Development Department said.

The former night club space has sat vacant since the city took control of it a year and a half ago. Lindsay says that could change soon.

City council will vote whether to approve a management contract for the building next month.

"The local real estate broker who thinks he can bring new life to the High Falls building is real estate broker Stuart Baker of S.E. Baker & Company. His office is just up the road from the building.

The city likes what he has been able to do with the area so far.

"It's an executive center or business incubator building that they've turned around from 20 to 30 percent occupancy to about close to 90 percent occupancy. Clearly he has the right connections. He's got the experience in leasing, and property management to take on a project like this," said Lindsay.

Baker does not want to talk about his plans until the deal's done, but Lindsay says they include an events center.

It would be run by well-known Rochester chef Tony Gullace.

He owns Max of Eastman Place, Max Chophouse in Brighton and Max at the Lake in Canandaigua. The new events center would be called "Max at High Falls."

Lindsay says pockets of space would be leased to office tenants and a restaurant would go on the lower level.

The three-year contract city council will vote on includes an option for the city or Baker to opt out of the deal without penalty.

"Lets face it, filling it up, making it vibrant with office, potential restaurant and events center is much better than having it sit there vacant and costing \$300,000 dollars a year," Lindsay said.



If the deal is successful, Lindsay believes it will cost the city and taxpayers less than a third of what it currently does to keep the building running.

The city cannot sell the Center at High Falls building for at least seven years; that is when a 23-year state grant expires that requires the city to keep the High Falls interpretive center museum open.

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