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Today:

High: 39°

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Full report page A10



2005

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Downtown's makeovers still moving forward

By Ruth Jones/staff
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STAUNTON — Under the cozy lighting of Devine Decor, downtown business-owners gathered to hear the latest happenings in their work neighborhood.

Sipping on drinks, munching and browsing the home decor store, owners caught up with each other, then listened to Economic Development Director Bill Hamilton update them on the growth of historic downtown.

"It's probably the best time ever to be in downtown Staunton," Hamilton said, mentioning that this year's assessments are up 28 percent.

"I think the property values demonstrate the good things that are going on."

Major projects are mostly on schedule, Hamilton said, including the Stonewall Jackson Hotel.

The Senate passed the final version of the bill to turn the former Western State Hospital property over to the Staunton

Industrial Development Authority on Thursday, Hamilton announced. Now it's ready to be handed over to the House for its stamp of approval.

"It's not been an easy time in Richmond, but we feel we'll prevail in the end," Hamilton said.

Owners got to ask questions of Robin Miller, one of the influential new faces to become a part of downtown. Miller is the devel-

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UPDATE



■ **Stonewall Jackson Hotel:** Construction running on schedule. The hotel should be completed by fall.



■ **Towne Centre:** In demolition phase, which should be completed in two to three weeks. The condos should be ready by August.



■ **Former Western State Hospital:** Waiting to be conveyed from the state to the Staunton ID. The bill is awaiting House approval.

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5-day forecast for Staunton & Waynesboro

TODAY



Partly sunny, breezy and colder.

high

TONIGHT



Mainly clear

REGIONAL FORECAST

Augusta County

Breezy and colder today with sunshine and a few clouds. Mainly clear and quite chilly tonight. Several hours of sunshine tomorrow; cold.

Rockbridge County

Breezy and colder today with sunshine and a few clouds. Mainly clear and quite chilly tonight. Several hours of sunshine tomorrow, but cold.

Highland and Bath counties

Sunshine mixing with a few clouds today; breezy and colder. Mainly clear and chilly tonight. Rather cold despite a good deal of sunshine tomorrow.

Shown is today's weather.
Temperatures are today's highs
and tonight's lows.

Coastal forecast, Virginia Beach to Myrtle Beach

Sunshine will mix with a few clouds today. Wind northwest at 10-20 knots. Waves 2-4 feet. Visibility clear to the horizon.



Downtown

Continued from the front page

oper for the Towne Centre and a developer on the former Western State property project.

Miller expressed his readiness to tackle the former Western State property, which is envisioned to be a village with residential space, commercial offices, retail and hospitality, including hotels and restaurants.

Until the bill is finished going through its process in Richmond, Miller can't begin work.

But he said he has started on plans for one building on the property and the city has agreed to run the trolley through the community once it's done.

Miller announced that he decided on the name "Old Y Lofts" for the condominiums, which will total 20 — 18 residential and two commercial. Prices haven't been finalized,

Miller said, but his early estimates ranged from \$200,000 to more than \$400,000.

"The demolition is almost finished," and should be done in about two to three weeks, Miller said.

News of the condos has inquiries rolling in.

"We're getting inquiries almost by the day," Miller said. "We've gotten now at least 25 names of prospective buyers."

"We're going to talk to those folks first before we officially go on the market."

Business After Hours quarterly meetings started three years ago, Staunton Downtown Development Director Kimberly Watters said.

She said it's a good chance for business owners to get to know each other and catch up.

"This is just a casual, relaxed way for them to do that," Watters said.