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After sitting idle about six years, the Warlong Glove building on the former Broyhill Furniture site in Conover will once again open to the public.

"We are ahead of schedule," said Conover City Manager Donald Duncan Jr.

Conover purchased the 27-acre Broyhill Furniture property in downtown Conover in 2005, after the company closed the facility's doors in 2004. Duncan, who originally thought the Conover Station project will take 10 years to complete, is now planning a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the summer.

"Our vision for Conover Station is to redevelop a former abandoned factory site into a mixed-use, sustainable development," said Conover Mayor Lee Moritz Jr. "Our vision included a combination of retail, light manufacturing, technology services and downtown habitation. Our bonus is a much expanded library space, a community gathering facility and a future rail designation when service is restored."

Warlong Building

Conover Station will consist of the Warlong building, which residents and passers-by on N.C. 16 can see from the road. This three-story building will house the Conover Library, a community room, Greenway Transit Authority administrative offices, a cafe and an outdoor patio with tables for visitors. In addition, Duncan said the N.C. Department of Transportation purchased a portion of the second floor, where Conover hopes to start a train depot. Until a depot opens, Duncan said the space can be used by the public for meetings.

The cost for the first phase of the Warlong building is estimated at \$2.1 million, and the project's second phase is about \$1.1 million. The second phase includes a rail platform, pedestrian bridge and ramp. The future phase will also have a "kiss and run" section for rail passengers to be dropped off and cross on a pedestrian bridge to take them into the second-floor of the Warlong building.

Construction has been extensive on the building, Duncan said the building never had a heating and air conditioning unit installed and the windows and walls were painted. All the windows were replaced in the building, and brick work that was once painted over now displays a natural look.

"The building will be cool and trendy looking," Duncan said. "The building will have a heavy, industrial look. It fits the character of Conover. The building itself tells the history of what happened here."

Conover City Council decided to make the Warlong building LEED certified or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. Duncan said plans are to have a silver rating on the building, but that will be determined by the amount of credits earned from making the building "green."

"(LEED certification) is hard to get on an old building," Duncan said.

One way construction crews are working to make the building LEED certified is creating an inverted roof to collect rain water. Duncan said the rain water will then be used to flush toilets in the building, as well as irrigate outdoor plants.

The first-floor, which consists of a community room and mechanical area, will have exposed metal beams and "shop-front windows," Duncan said. The building will have an elevator, as well as stairs for visitors.

The second-floor will serve as the main entrance, where the Greenway T.A. offices will be located. However, the building will have a total of three public entrances and three exit-only doors.

The third-floor will house the library, the NCDOT area and the outdoor patio will allow visitors to sit and see Conover's downtown area from any angle, while enjoying a cup of coffee from the cafe and a book from the library, Duncan said.

Conover City Council has a couple of interested merchants who want to establish the coffee shop or cafe inside Conover Station. Duncan said no decision has been made on who will open the business. City Council is expected to discuss tenants during a retreat Monday at 5 p.m. in the training room at the Conover Police Department.

Conover Station is expected to have 180 angled parking spaces, which will be on-street parking, Duncan said.

"An opportunity exists where there has never been before," said Conover City Councilman Don Beal. "(Conover Station) is the new downtown."

Outdoor life

Conover Station's stormwater system will treat water that's never been cleaned before, according to Terry Lail, Conover environmental coordinator.

Recently, Lail met with Jewel Engineering Co., water quality division of N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources and a representative with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to discuss plans to create a management practice plan for the stormwater system at Conover Station.

Conover previously received a \$415,000 grant to install a stormwater system at Conover Station to clean water runoff. Lail said any time anyone is working close to a U.S. water stream, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers must be involved to provide guidance about working with water from the stream.

Lail said the stormwater system will go alongside the city's plan to create a park at Conover Station.

"Citizens are going to be pleasantly surprised," Beal said. "They are the winners. We are going to have a nice park."

The park will have walking trails with educational kiosks explaining the stormwater treatment system at the site.

"The (Best Management Practice, or BMP, plan) will treat stormwater runoff from Conover Station and downtown," Lail said. "We are treating water that's never been treated before."

Lail said the water will go into McLin Creek, then Lyle Creek and into the Catawba River.

"It may not benefit anyone upstream, but downstream will benefit because it's drinking water (for the public out of the Catawba River)," Lail said.

Manufacturing Solutions Center

Manufacturing Solutions Center, currently located at Catawba Valley Community College's East Campus, takes backyard ideas and creates a product to be sold across the world. It will soon find its home at Conover Station.

"MSC will create the next generation of manufacturing (in Conover)," Duncan said.

MSC will be a 16-foot high, single-story building located beside the Warlong building. It will be 30,000-square-feet, which is 10,000-square-feet larger than its current location. It's expected to be completed in 2012 at Conover Station.

"It has been published that two-thirds of the net jobs created in the private sector originate among small firms or small business births," Moritz said. "The smallest segment, which is one to 19 associates, produces the most new jobs relative to its share of total employment."

Duncan said MSC creates more than 150 jobs a year in existing industries. MSC is a nonprofit organization that functions through the N.C. Community College System and has 18 full-time employees and 19 part-time workers.

"The Manufacturing Solutions Center will become a business accelerator for new product innovation both in and outside textiles," Moritz said. "When companies launch their businesses from this facility, our hope is they will plug into our local communities, use our available industrial properties and employ our skilled and able workforce."

The organization started 20 years ago in the hosiery business, but has expanded. MSC now works with medical devices, motorcycles, textiles, upholstery, plastics, furniture, biotech and green manufacturing, to name a few. Moritz said MSC can provide "new and existing companies with low-cost testing, research and development."

"Manufacturing Solutions Center has a real partnership with Conover Station," said Dan St. Louis, MSC director. "Nobody does what we do in the community college system."

To stay up-to-date on Conover Station's progress, check out weekly pictures at www.conoverstation.com^[3]. Duncan expects a ribbon-cutting ceremony to be held no later than August, which is when the building will start to be occupied by Greenway employees.

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The Warlong Glove building at Conover Station is almost ready to open after sitting idle about six years.
CONOVER, N.C.

Staff Writer

Observer News Enterprise

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