

The Herald

September 14, 2007

By: SCOTT WHIPPLE and ALICE CLAYTON, Herald staff and Journal Register News Service

City Carvel developer building 'Landmark'

MIDDLETOWN - Downtown Middletown is about to get a multimillion-dollar addition. Centerplan Development Co. of Hartford announced plans for a two-story, mixed-use development called Landmark Square to be built at the current site of The Middletown Press building. The Press will move to a new location in Middletown.

A September 2008 completion is expected for Landmark Square. In June, Centerplan - founded only last year - began construction in New Britain on a headquarters and manufacturing operation for Celebration Foods, the company that makes Carvel ice cream cakes and other desserts.

The company is also involved in a number of other projects around the state, including a large condominium development in downtown New Haven. Plans for the 32,689-square-foot Landmark Square, to be built on the northwest corner of Main and Union streets, include a 4,675-square-foot restaurant - so far not identified - and 11,085 square feet of second-floor office space.

There will be off-street parking for 110 cars. Rite Aid pharmacy will be the anchor tenant, moving from a site roughly a block away. The company has wanted to relocate to a larger store that would also give it drive-through service, said Bob Landino, Centerplan's founder and president. The move opens a key location - at a corner leading into Metro Square, the home of the city's movie theaters, as well as restaurants and other businesses.

There was no word on what might move into the site Rite Aid would leave. "Over the past several years, downtown Middletown has been undergoing a remarkable period of revitalization," said Landino in a written statement. "Centerplan is looking forward to supporting the city's continuing growth and renewal."

Middletown Press Publisher Chris Chamberlain believes Centerplan's vision for the property "will take the downtown area to the next level while preserving Main Street's unique character." The development is designed to fit naturally into the historic context of Main Street, Landino said. The architect for the project is the B.L. Cos. of Meriden. Centerplan has yet to select a construction company.

In describing the project, Landino said the building's design reinforces the human scale and walkability of Main Street while providing "a strong architectural statement." "While the strong design rounds the corner on Union street, it also continues eastward along the new pedestrian connection to parking in the rear," Landino said. "This rich north facade, unusual for an urban building, provides an elegant visual backdrop for the southbound traveler."

Landino anticipates a December close for the real estate transaction, at which time Centerplan will move into the demolition and construction phases at the site. Sale of the Middletown Press property is being handled by Trevor Davis Commercial Real estate.

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Regarding a new location for The Middletown Press, Chamberlain said the paper had "been a committed member of the Middletown community since 1884. We look forward to continuing that commitment at a new Middletown location that better suits the needs of our operation.

"I look forward to announcing the new location very soon," he said. Larry McHugh, president of the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce, has also seen the plans. "I'm very excited," McHugh said. "It covers all the areas [restaurants, retail and office space] that we need."

Landmark Square will continue to contribute to Middletown's renaissance, Landino said, expanding the city's retail and office capacity and bringing businesses and jobs into the city.