

It's official: Adena, Chesler Group commit to restoring Carlisle Building

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After nearly 11 years and numerous stops and starts, the Carlisle Building — a downtown landmark since 1885 — will be renovated and occupied by Adena Health System.

Mark Shuter, Adena's president and CEO, and Michael Chesler, the president of the Chesler Group, signed the lease paperwork for a 15-year period Thursday at the PACCAR Medical Education Center. Work on the \$7 million project is scheduled to begin in April or May and should be completed in late 2015.

"Instead of cowering when you turn on Paint and Main streets, you will see a beautiful new building," said Chesler, whose Cleveland-based development group will handle the renovations. He also praised Shuter and the board of Adena Health System for their vision for a downtown site that will house some administrative offices on the first floor and have three floors of living space for medical residents who will be working at Adena's sites.

"This project helps us meet the needs of our medical education students," Shuter said. "We wanted a project that would make an impact for our community."

The pending renovation of the Carlisle is a long-awaited fix for people tired of looking at the vacant building that was badly damaged by fire in spring 2003. However, it's the long-term effect on downtown could end up being the biggest win for Chillicothe.

Chris Manegold, CEO of the Economic Development Alliance of Southern Ohio, said it has been "a long struggle" to get things together, especially because past attempts by others concerning the Carlisle have failed.

"This is just the right combination and the right time with the perseverance obviously over a multiyear period to get it done," Manegold said. "(Adena) has certainly made their commitment to the community."

He said the upcoming renovation is an important one that will change the atmosphere in downtown Chillicothe.

"The psychological effect of this project is important or more important than the economic effect because of what it's going to do to restore that corner to bring people along in thinking that, 'Yes, this is a downtown and community worth investing in,' and what it will mean with a young population downtown with expectations and demands for certain types of services and so on will probably upgrade the offerings in downtown as well," Manegold said.

JobsOhio, the state's privately run economic development agency, kicked in a \$1 million loan and a \$500,000 grant to help the project. The commitment was the first for JobsOhio's new revitalization fund that began at the end of this past year, said Kristi Tanner, who serves as managing director at the organization.

The neighboring Howson Building also will be stabilized during the project, but isn't expected to be occupied by Adena. The move will allow for Howson to be opened up for future development.

The Carlisle Building has stood unoccupied since the 2003 fire, and several efforts have been launched to renovate the building. None of them — before Thursday — gained any traction. Shuter said Thursday's gathering was more than just signing a lease as the building's revitalization will bring another revenue source to the city while contributing to downtown business growth.

"This is the right thing for us to do and the right time to do it," Shuter said.

Shuter added the overall process to get to this point has been about two and a half years in the making in terms of being able to bring Chesler, the health system, the state and the community onto the same page.

"I just appreciate the support of many people in the community coming forward ... and without community support, we would've never been here," Shuter said.

"And we can truly say this about the Carlisle: The people that have helped us have been vital in getting this project together."

Randy Davies, president and CEO of the Chillicothe-Ross Chamber of Commerce, described the project as being "a huge shot in the arm" and said he is excited to see things get started. Chesler, whose firm has restored about 30 historic buildings, said the renovation will use about \$2.8 million in state and federal historic tax credits that have been obtained. He said work is in the development and design phase.

Chesler said he was hopeful he would be able to close on financing in the next 60 days before closing on the building. After that occurs, construction is expected to begin — first involving tearing down some outbuildings in the rear of the structure, he said.

"The idea would be sometime in April or May we'll be scaffolding the building and getting going," Chesler said. "This is exactly the kind of building that we've done many times before and our whole business is designed around solutions to restoring commercial-significant buildings that are historic."

Chesler said the project, when completed, ultimately will "bring romance downtown" and he intends to use as many local resources as possible moving forward.

"It's a very important time for the city because the citizenry will know that finally something is being done to that black eye on the corner," he said. "I love Chillicothe ... and Chillicothe's a great town, very proud people and we're thrilled to be here."

City Councilwoman Nancy Ames said the restored Carlisle also will change the overall perception of the building.

"Instead of a centerpiece of our downtown being a burned-out shell, we'll have a centerpiece of our downtown that's something alive, something that is making the community a vibrant, wonderful place," Ames said.