

# Down by the river

Appleton eyes several development projects along the Fox River



The River Heath development is expected to get under way this year, with a mix of residential, retail and business spaces.

Appleton is a city built on the water. Paper mills were built on the Fox River and the city grew outward. But looking at the city today, most residents don't recognize its waterfront. That's about to change, according to local economic development officials.

"For many years, Appleton – like a lot of cities – didn't really pay attention to its riverfront. That changed about five years ago and since then we've been focused on developing the riverfront economically and as a place where the community can come and enjoy it," says Karen Harkness, Appleton's director of community development.

As the paper mills that once

dominated Appleton's riverfront have shuttered – only Neenah Paper remains today – Harkness says business leaders began to recognize the huge economic

potential of developing the waterfront. In the past few years, Fratellos and Pullmans opened along the river and the former Atlas Mill was turned into the home of several businesses, including The Paper Discovery Center.

"We're now ready to take the next step and develop the riverfront even more," says Harkness, who

took over as Appleton's economic development guru when longtime director Peter Hensler retired in 2008. Harkness knows a lot about riverfront development. While with Future Neenah, she spearheaded plans to revitalize that city's waterfront.

Appleton's riverfront revival moved ahead this past summer when the Appleton Common Council created a Tax Increment Financing District that includes the former Foremost Dairy site on the river's west side and the property known as the River Heath development on the east side. Having the TIF district in place will jumpstart the projects, which will increase the city's tax base in the years to come, says Harkness.

"In these different economic times, the status quo is no longer acceptable. Financial institutions are looking to municipalities to show their support for projects like this through public investment," she says.

Construction at River Heath is

"The riverfront is truly a growth corridor for us."

–Jennifer Stephany, Appleton Downtown Inc.

expected to begin later this year. Developer Mark Geall has scaled back his original plans, but is still planning to build condos – including some dwellings that will be available for rent – and a mix of retail and business space. An essential part of the project is to create green spaces along the Fox River, he says.

Plans at the Foremost Dairy site are not as far along, but the developers are planning for eight condo units, as well as a three-acre public park site. "Any time we can obtain access to the waterfront, it's exciting," Harkness says.

Jennifer Stephany, executive director of Appleton Downtown Inc., a business advocacy group, says adding more residences to the downtown can only help local businesses thrive.

"The riverfront is truly a growth corridor for us. It's been part of our vision, which is why we pushed to add the riverfront stops to our free trolley route," she says. "The riverfront can only add to the downtown as being a destination point for people who live here or for tourists."

#### AWAY FROM THE WATER

The recession hasn't stopped building in the city's two business parks, Harkness says. In October, the \$34 million Encircle Health, a partnership with ThedaCare, will open in Appleton's Northeast Business Park. The building, which brings primary providers, specialists, diagnostic testing and outpatient surgery under one roof, is one of the largest facilities to be built in recent years on the city's north side.

"That's a huge addition for us," says Harkness, adding that many small- and medium-sized projects are continuing both in the Northeast Business Park and the newer South Point Commerce Park on Appleton's southeast side.

Appleton is also in the process of updating its comprehensive plan, which was last done in 1996. Harkness says the document will provide a vision the community can use going forward. "The plan provides [continued]»

#### CLOSER LOOK

##### Putting the plan together

The City of Appleton is putting together its first comprehensive plan since 1996. The plan is a work in progress and can be viewed at [www.appleton.org/departments/development](http://www.appleton.org/departments/development).



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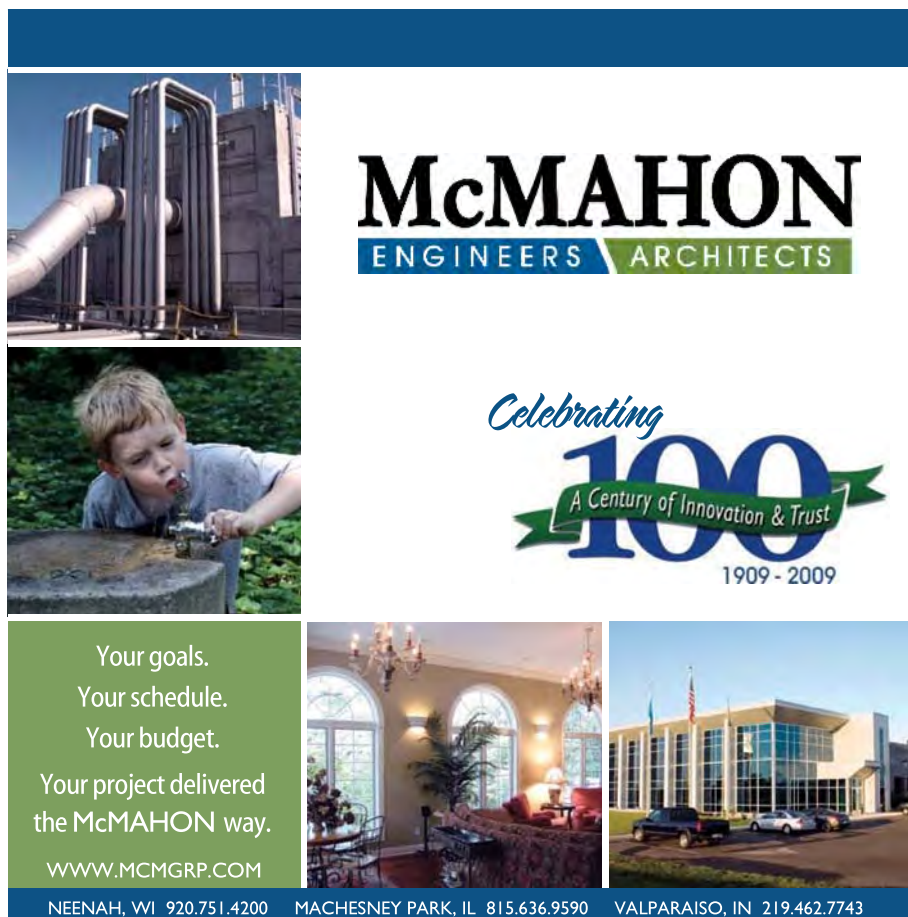
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a vision for the community's future. It is about how we view ourselves and where we are going.

"It guides growth and development of a community, guidance and direction," she says.

The city began its downtown chapter in 2008 and Harkness anticipates it will be adopted by the Common Council later this year. The plan identifies four special areas for study: the Fox River Corridor, the Wisconsin Avenue Corridor, Richmond Street and South Oneida Street. The plan will look at neighborhoods, zoning and transportation issues and more.

"The possibilities for Appleton are endless," Harkness says. ①

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## Kimberly seeks new life for closed mill

A year after NewPage Corp. closed its Kimberly facility, putting 600 people out of work, village officials are pulling together a team to help sell the mill.

When the Ohio-based papermaker closed the mill in September 2008, it didn't plan on selling the mill. That changed in April when NewPage announced it would sell the mill to a buyer seeking to make a noncompeting product. NewPage retained banking firm Sanabe & Associates to assist with macro-scale marketing efforts to sell the mill.

Since then, Kimberly Administrator Rick Hermus has pulled together a team with representatives from the village, New North Inc., Outagamie County and the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce & Industry to look at options for the mill, which has been a part of the community since the Kimberly-Clark Corp. opened it in 1889. A new town – named for mill founder John A. Kimberly – quickly formed around it. ①