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City of Warwick successfully repurposing former buildings - by Mayor Frank Picozzi

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Frank Picozzi

Warwick's diverse commercial mix, expanding residential options, miles of scenic waterfront, and great recreational facilities are just some of the many reasons people are eager to live in and operate a business here. Add in convenient access to Rhode Island T.F. Green International Airport, an intermodal MBTA commuter rail station and easy on/off to Rtes. 95 and 295, and it's easy to see why Warwick is becoming an increasingly popular place for investors and home to a number of creative new projects.

This creativity has been particularly evident recently with the repurposing of and planned projects throughout the city: AAA Northeast carefully renovated a 100-plus-year-old mill building into office space for its local branch and Warwick municipal departments; there are plans underway to convert a former Sheraton Hotel into more than 200 units of apartments; two new residential developments, totaling approximately 55 single-family homes and new roadways, will be built on former elementary school properties, and the former Aldrich Junior High School has been sold, with an eye to preserve the building and renovate it to accommodate apartment-style housing for those 55 years of age and older.

Additionally, Ocean State Credit Union earlier this month celebrated the grand opening of their first Warwick branch, housed in a beautiful new building that kept the bones of the old restaurant building intact, and U-Haul has plans to convert the former Ann & Hope Outlet Shops building for storage and vehicle rental uses. And, of course, for several years now, the mixed residential/commercial mixed use Pontiac Mills has stood as an award-winning example of historic preservation and reuse.

Now, that reuse practice will be extending to two properties formerly owned by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Providence, which were recently sold. Like the Warwick School Department, which has consolidated and closed elementary, junior and senior high schools due to declining enrollment, the Diocese has merged several Warwick parishes in the past several years. Two properties, St. Catherine Church and St. Francis of Assisi Church and School, were subsequently put up for sale this year.

St. Catherine, which opened in Apponaug Village in 1919, was sold to Bluth, LLC, for \$1 million. Brothers Bob and Matt Tanning, the new owners whose family worshipped at the church while they were growing up, are reportedly committed to keeping the structure intact even as they determine the best course of action for development. The St. Francis property was purchased for \$1.6 million for use by the Chesterton Academy of Our Lady of Hope, a new Catholic high school in Rhode Island. The sale includes a garage, church, parish house, and school on roughly three acres on Jefferson Blvd. just on the outskirts of the City Centre Warwick development district.

There are other properties throughout the community that can be similarly re-purposed for exciting new uses that will improve the aesthetic appearance of the area, add to the diversity of Warwick's commercial base, and provide exciting new opportunities for growth and success for companies looking for a community that offers all the modern conveniences of a large city with the feel of a

smaller, close-knit town.

To learn more about Warwick and development opportunities, please call the Department of Economic Development at (401) 738-2014 or email econ.dir@warwickri.gov

Frank Picozzi is the mayor of the city of Warwick, R.I.

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