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City of Warwick has many exciting developments to look forward to - by Frank Picozzi

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Frank Picozzi

While it's difficult to believe that another year is drawing to a close already, a lot has been accomplished in the city of Warwick throughout 2023, with many exciting developments to look forward to in the New Year.

The beginning of construction at the former Sheraton Hotel on Post Rd. is imminent and will see the interior of the building transformed into studio apartments with other amenities. The project has been approved for up to 238 units, and will be a welcome addition to our housing stock. Just down the road, construction of a 122-room WoodSpring Suites extended-stay hotel is slated to begin in the spring, bringing Warwick's complement of lodging options to 17. Another development, also by Gold Coast Properties, recently received master plan approval and will see a 124-room ECHOSuites constructed adjacent to the WoodSpring property once the approval process is completed in the upcoming year.

Buildings at the former John Wickes and Randall Holden Elementary Schools have been demolished to make way for a total of more than 50 housing units. The sale of the former Buttonwoods Municipal Annex and Community Center has also recently been completed, and, in time, the building that was originally a municipal schoolhouse will be razed to accommodate construction of a residential development. The new year will also see the revitalization and redevelopment of the nearly 90-year-old, stately building that was the former Nelson Aldrich Junior High School into affordable senior (age 55+) housing units, with rents spanning those deemed affordable to market-rate. Boston-based Winn Development Cos. submitted the winning bid of \$2 million, which was recently approved by the city council, for the property.

On the recreational front, the completion of much-needed improvements brought a facelift to the Apponaug Babe Ruth Baseball League facility adjacent to city hall, thanks to a \$320,000 grant from the R.I. Department of Environmental Management and a \$469,950 allocation from the city's Office of Housing and Community Development. Work included installation of new equipment, upgrades to walking paths that loop through the property, additional handicapped-accessible parking, and installation of new safety netting, handrails, landscaping, benches, tables, and bleachers.

In 2024, the community will also see the start of construction of the eagerly-awaited City Hall Plaza, which will be constructed on the site of the former annex building behind City Hall. The plaza will include a public outdoor ice skating rink, which will transform into a community plaza during warmer months. The project plans also call for parking lot improvements; new concrete curbing to define parking areas and pedestrian walks; new paver walks and plaza areas; installation of entry, informational, and interpretive wayfinding signage; construction of a new building for concessions, skate rental, mechanicals room, and restrooms; construction of an ADA-accessible walk and landing area; and installation of new landscaping and site adornments, including benches, electric vehicle charging stations, trash receptacles, bike racks, and lighting.

Earlier this month, the city held its first "Strolling Rolling Apponaug Winter Festival" throughout the historic village, to rave reviews from attendees. We expect that the plaza, once complete, will be a

focal point for what will be an annual event, and further add to the feel of an old-fashioned holiday community celebration.

And speaking of community celebrations, as we bid farewell to 2023, be sure to stop by the third annual New Year's Eve fireworks celebration, which begins at 3 p.m. at Rocky Point Park. The event will include food trucks, festive music, giveaways and more! Fireworks will light the sky at 6 p.m.

For more information about our community, please email econ.dir@warwickri.gov or call (401) 738-2014.

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

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