

# Major developments on Spartanburg's Northside keep community momentum going

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

## New NDG CEO helping to keep things moving on the Northside



From his Northside Development Group office in the recently completed Northside Station building, NDG CEO Michael Williamson has a great view of Howard Street. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant the NDG's new community room — visualized as a regular gathering place for Northside neighbors to gather for various meetings and events — has yet to be used and it is difficult to predict when that will change.

But while the activity level inside the new space has been curtailed, just outside and within view of Williamson's desk the steady rumble of man and machine moving dirt and making progress on a community redevelopment effort unparalleled in the city's history continues. It is an appropriate allegory for the entire Northside Initiative, which has been driven by a group of Northside residents and city leaders who have overcome a mountain of challenges during the past decade. From winning in court against a billionaire developer and NFL team owner to convincing the Army Corps of Engineers to approve a first-of-its-kind wetlands mitigation project, they have learned too many lessons to properly detail here.

*"How To Keep A Community Engaged and Projects Moving During a Pandemic"* can be added to the list.

"We're not stopping — we might not be as visible right now, but we are moving forward," said Williamson, who started in his role in March, just as schools and businesses were shutting down en masse and people were learning exactly what social distancing meant. "More so than a lot of other aspects of life, the redevelopment of the Northside has continued fairly seamlessly."

The headliner might be the completion of major construction at the [new Dr. T.K. Gregg Community Center](#). But the rundown of other significant projects underway or about to get underway is impressive:

- **Northside Station Apartments (500 Howard St.):** After some initial site work, financing on this 90-unit apartment complex on the northwest corner of the Howard and College intersection closed recently and construction has moved into high gear. The \$17 million development will include 80 affordable and 10 market-rate units. The NDG, Spartanburg Housing Authority and the city are partners in the project, which is expected to be completed in May 2021.

- **College at Creekside Pocket Neighborhood:** Adjacent to Butterfly Creek and bounded by College, Brawley and Manning streets, this site will be the home to 35 single-family homes, a mix of detached and attached townhomes and brownstones. The project received conceptual approval from the city recently.
- **Raindrop Street Townhomes:** Montgomery Development has broken ground on the construction of this 43-unit townhome project. Located between Raindrop and Milan streets and adjacent to Northside Station, the project will include 43 3 bedroom/2 bathroom units, 25 percent of which will be affordable and targeted to households at 80 percent of the area's median income. Combined with the Northside Station Apartments, this means at least 90 affordable housing units are on the way in the Northside.
- **Spartanburg Housing Authority/Star Mill Renovation (170 Arch St.):** The Spartanburg Housing Authority will soon move into new offices in the former Star Mill. SHA is currently located just outside the city limits on Pine Street, and the new location in the heart of the Northside and along a city bus line will bring obvious benefits to the community and people the SHA serves. James Bakker and Tom Finegan, who pulled off the renovation of the Montgomery Building, are handling the \$3 million redevelopment of the long-vacant old mill building.

In addition to those residential and office projects, preliminary work continues on a pair of potential projects that could bring significant new retail and restaurant space to the area. A pair of Greenville-based developers, independent of another, are seeking to redevelop the site of the former Sunshine Inn on Church Street and the Aden Street railroad warehouses. The pandemic has slowed things down, but work continues and optimism remains that these promising projects will proceed.

While the timeline may end up being longer than hoped, Williamson pointed out that all the current residential construction is priming the neighborhood for eventual retail development. "The activity happening here now is important — with the community wanting retailers like a grocery store to locate here, those type of retailers look at rooftops," Williamson said. " ... That's part of why (NDG Community Engagement Coordinator) Tony Thomas is working really hard on the Census right now and trying to make sure that all Northside residents get counted. One of Tony's focuses is participation in the Census and making sure people in the Northside understand it's important for them to be counted."

That effort would have been bolstered by the ability to use the NDG's new community room or the Gregg Center to engage local residents and provide access to computers to complete the Census. Regardless, it's clear even now how much the Northside Station and T.K. Gregg projects are going to elevate the community, Williamson said. Soon, AccessHealth Spartanburg will move into its space in Northside Station, joining the NDG and BirthMatters. Wofford College also has space in the building, along with 20 apartments on the upper two floors. Prior to moving in, the NDG operated from donated space in an aging Spartanburg School District 7 administration building on Howard Street.

“I think it’s an important step for us,” Williamson said. “The school district was very generous to allow us to occupy that space, but this space is really set up for the work we do. I’m looking out at Howard Street from my office right now and can see the work on the apartments across the street. There is a physical transparency with these offices that is really important. Our conference room even has a garage door that opens to the street — the idea that this is a community space and we will have it completely opened up at different times. There will be a seamlessness between our space and the community.”