

# HOUSING NECESSARY BEYOND DOWNTOWN, STROE & ADLER STEP IN

**By Emily Gowdey-Backus,  
Director of Communications**

A former stamp manufacturing facility, the building at 128 Chandler St. in Worcester reflects the strength of the city's allure.

In the next 16 months, the 1890 building will be transformed with the help of historic tax credits into 47 market-rate studio and one-bedroom apartments. And they can't come fast enough.

As Worcester's population increases, those figures are compounded by the opportunities available in the Heart of the Commonwealth for millennial-generation adults, and others, looking to advance their careers in a location that won't break the bank.

In 2010, the last U.S. Census counted 181,045 residents of Worcester. Seven years later, the most recent U.S. Census Bureau figures show a rise to 184,743 and the city expects that number to go higher in the 2020 Census.

With this influx, housing is in high demand. And it's not just single-family homes for which city residents are clamoring, a surfeit of variety is needed.

"The development at 128 Chandler St. adds much-needed housing to the city's stock in a time when vacancy rates are extremely low for renters," said Vaske Gjino, the Chamber's economic development associate.

He said the neighboring property,

126 Chandler St., is similarly poised for renovation and will see Worcester Common Ground add roughly 30 affordable-rate units to the local market.

Together, both properties are "a prime example of mixed-income housing development – exactly what we strive to support throughout Worcester," he added.

Currently vacant, Daniel Stroe, managing member of Stamp Factory Lofts LLC, said the WCG project "compliments" his company's plans.

He feels the location, Chandler and Piedmont streets, away from the downtown, was serendipitous.

"We feel there's a need for workforce housing in that type of neighborhood and this building was a good example of conversion potential to accomplish that vision," he said of the purchase made with business partner Tim Adler.

Located between Park Avenue and Main Street, the building lies outside of the Downtown Worcester Business Improvement District and away from luxury-style apartment complexes popping up around Union Station. But, said Mr. Stroe, not too far to commute there for work by car – let alone bike or on foot.

While some of his and Mr. Adler's projects have occurred within that sector of the city, namely a six-story Norwich Street office building converted into apartments, Mr. Stroe said this time, and with this type of housing in particular, he's

pleased to be working in an area which has yet to be over-saturated with development.

"It's good we're not [operating] in the same place as 10 other developers," he said. "It's good to ... spread it around the city."

In the case of 128 Chandler St., said Mr. Stroe: "If this building were closer to downtown, I wouldn't have discredited it. It has a very good function where it is," he said noting proximity to the bus station.

This neighborhood, said Mr. Stroe "needs housing" and exists within an Opportunity Zone and is therefore a win-win. However, he added, "it's also a question of finding the right fit" with the type of renovations in which he and Mr. Adler have excelled.

The pair choose projects which modernize historic facilities while maintaining original architectural and design elements representative of a neighborhood's age and which tie back to earlier uses of the property.

"Our purpose is to make it modern and functional, but not change too much of the historic appeal," said Mr. Stroe.

With this project, "hopefully, you won't see too much of a difference on the outside," he added.

While windows will be replaced and "restoration of features that were lost, [including a Piedmont Street door]" will be executed, he said the public can expect a finished

product very similar to Winn Residential's Canal Lofts at 39 Water St. in Worcester.

Once the Chandler Street renovation is complete and marketing of the units begins, given the neighborhood and style of housing, Mr. Stroe said cost is a top concern.

Utilities and parking will be included in the rental cost of these studio and one-bedroom apartments, he said of the balance being struck between affordable and market-rate housing needed in Worcester.

Stamp Factory Lofts LLC, he said, "[is] not affordable housing and not luxury. It's in the middle."

Not far beyond Chandler and Piedmont streets, nine-tenths of one mile in fact, is Kelley Square and the proposed site of Polar Park and a slate of planned redevelopment.

While Mr. Stroe said the decision to purchase and renovate 128 Chandler St. was made by himself and his business partner prior to the announcement of the relocation of the Pawtucket Red Sox to Worcester, he feels the redevelopment of the Canal District-Green Island-Kelley Square region would mean a significant improvement to the neighborhood streets abutting the property.

"The most important impact," he said, "is the proposed modernization of Kelley Square, which would mean better access for the middle Chandler Street area."

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April 2019