
The DAILY NEWS

Jeff Roche has a time-lapse camera mounted on a tree overlooking his 141 Chestnut Street development. He's hoping, one day, to show a time-lapse photography exhibit showing how the old Hamilton House was transformed into a new apartment complex in the blink of an eye. You know, one of those deals where the seed germinates and transforms into a flower right before your eyes.

Well, Roche's apartment complex isn't quite blooming into a full flower yet, but it is well on its way.

Roche said he is still aiming for full completion sometime in the fall, and despite a flood of phone calls, he is not yet taking applications for the new apartments that will be geared toward elderly Needham residents.

"The focus right now, 12 hours a day, is to get this thing up and going," said Roche. "I've been telling people that when we start to take applications, that's what we're going to be doing full time."

Although the new development is still months away from completion, it has already taken on a new look as the front portion of the building has been knocked down with the equivalent square footage being relocated to the back of the structure.

"Things have been moving along very well," said Roche. "I'm very pleased with the progress so far."

Roche said with the completion of the structure's frame, the apartment units have become defined.

"They're really nice, better than I thought, actually," he said.

Next up, according to Roche, is The old Hamilton House nursing home on Chestnut Street is well into its transformation into apartment units to tidy up the front section along Chestnut Street.

"I'm hoping that in about six weeks, the front section will look like the finished product," he said.

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people that when we start to take applications, that's what we're going to be doing full time." Jeff Roche, developer of Chestnut Street apartment complex

Roche purchased the Chestnut Street plot last year and proposed a 28-unit apartment complex that will include six affordable units. The building, which was built in 1961, was home to the Hamilton House Nursing Home until its closure early last year.

Spurred by concerns from the Planning Board over parking spaces, Roche unveiled the current plan to remove what was the front section of the old nursing home building and tack the equivalent square footage to the back of the structure, thus increasing the parking from 13 spaces to 27.

The Zoning Board of Appeals approved Roche's comprehensive permit for the project last fall.

Roche first devised the plan for the elderly housing complex because of its proximity to downtown as well as public transportation and Deaconess-Glover Hospital.

Since at least 25 percent of the units will be defined as affordable, Needham will be able to count the entire complex - all 28 units - toward its affordable housing stock. Currently, less than 4 percent of Needham's stock is affordable, which is six percentage points less than the state's mandated 10 percent.

A 26-year resident of the town, Roche said he plans on giving preference to Needham residents, although by law he cannot restrict units solely to Needhamites. He said residents will be notified via the local papers as well as the Council on Aging and the Senior Center when applications are being accepted.

But for now, Roche's concentration is solely on construction.

"This is a project we have to take in stages," he said.