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Massachusetts Historical Commission honors 2 restored downtown Pittsfield buildings



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By Amanda Drane, The Berkshire Eagle

PITTSFIELD — The state honored two downtown buildings Thursday with historic preservation awards from the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

Work done at the Howard and Onota buildings stood among about a dozen projects statewide to be recognized. Secretary of State William Galvin, chairman of the commission, called restoration of the two city buildings an extraordinary feat.

"The successful rehabilitation of the Howard and Onota buildings stands as an important accomplishment for downtown Pittsfield," he said in a release. "The projects the commission is recognizing this year are particularly diverse and represent the many creative ways that significant historic resources are being preserved across the commonwealth."

The Howard and Onota buildings — built in 1916 and 1927, respectively — are owned by Allegrone Cos., which renovated and converted them into a mix of commercial and residential real estate.

"The successful use of both state and federal historic tax credits demonstrates the feasibility of projects of this size and scope in downtown Pittsfield, and the role that historic preservation can play in the city's ongoing economic growth," Galvin's release states.

Louis Allegrone, an owner at Allegrone Cos., said the family business was inspired to fill a need for downtown apartments.

"There's clearly a need for higher-end housing, and we thought it was important to have more people living downtown to support the growth and support the businesses," he said, adding that he has had no problem filling all 39 of the two buildings' units. "So far, it seems like there's still a demand for higher-end rental housing, and the city could use a lot more of it."

The Howard building, designed by local architect Joseph McArthur, sits at First and Federal streets. It's a three-story brick-and-beam building built for Frank Howard Inc., a hardware store that occupied the first floor until 1960.

The Onota building, home to Onota 74 Residences, is a six-story building at 74 North St. Its red-brick stylings and limestone trim were designed in the 1920s by Walter & Weeks Architects. It was long occupied by department store Holden and Stone, which closed in 1969.

Allegrone said that, according to the conditions for the tax incentives, his company retained the historic facades of the buildings, restored their windows and returned storefronts to their original configuration.

Accomplishing this, he said, took a "good bit of research" poring over old blueprints and photographs.

"Pittsfield Historic Commission was very helpful," he said.

He said there are plenty of historic buildings downtown that could use the same attention, and tax incentives offer an affordable way to do it.

"Hopefully, us — or someone else — will be fueled by these projects," he said.

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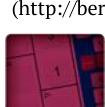
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