

Architect buys Park St. block

By Ryan Hutton, North Adams Transcript

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ADAMS — After falling in love with one of Park Street's oldest buildings, a Boston architect has decided to invest in the commercial development of the town.

Chiong Lin closed the deal on the Mausert Block, which consists of four storefronts and 18 apartments, for \$600,000 on Monday. She bought it from Thomas Hawke, who has owned the building for close to 30 years and who decided to get out of the apartment business. However, Lin is ready to take his place.

"I was looking for real estate to invest in, and I was looking all over the country, thinking that Massachusetts was too expensive but I had never considered the Berkshires," she said Tuesday. "When I saw the building online I thought it was beautiful, and when I looked at the price I couldn't believe it."

After researching the area, Lin decided to visit in person. She met with Peter West of Premiere Reality and, when she found out there were other offers on the building, she put in hers — without even seeing the inside.

"Because I'm an architect, I look at buildings all the time and I could see this was a special building in a special little town," she said. "I love turn-of-the-century buildings, especially brick ones. I love modern buildings, too, but there's just something timeless about brick. They seem like they'll last forever."

Lin isn't the only one excited about her new purchase. Director of Community Development Donna Cesan said she has been speaking with Lin since late February about the possibility of Lin using the town's facade grant to redo the Mausert Block's exterior. Cesan said she hopes the new exterior will help her fill the building's two empty storefronts. The building used to house an F.W. Woolworth's store years ago; several smaller businesses have been in the space since.

"That has long been recognized as one of the key places where there's potential to attract new business — along with the Jones Block and the Carlow Building," Cesan said. "I'm really excited that she'd like to participate in the program. We've waited for a long time to have someone come along who was willing to make the necessary investment to attract new business."

Working with West, Lin said she wants to get some new businesses into the spaces as soon as possible, but doesn't want to do it before the facade work is done. She said she is also toying with the idea of turning the larger storage area in the rear of the building into another storefront, perhaps one that can cater to the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail, just behind the building. Lin said she also wants to discuss different possibilities for filling the space with town officials. She said she has already gotten a number of suggestions from townsfolk.

"I've been talking to a lot of people and they all have so many ideas about what should go in there," she said. "Bike shops, dance theaters, there's so much vision and imagination in town, it's great."

A resident of Boston, Lin considers her self a New Englander even though she didn't settle here until she was 18. Her parents emigrated from Taiwan and she spent most of her life going from city to city. She received both her bachelor's and master's degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and currently works for an architectural firm. While she will continue to live and work in Boston, Lin said she already feels so welcome in Adams, she wants to spend summer weekends here.

"Everybody's so friendly, I love them all. They are all concerned about their community and very welcoming," she said. "Tom , the seller, gave me a jar of homemade jelly at the closing. You barely see the seller in Boston so this is a very special place."

Lin is no stranger to real estate; she has owned a multifamily apartment building in Cambridge since 1995 but she said she still gets nervous thinking about her new investment.

"I'm a little nervous because I've never taken on anything this big before. I'm not a big-time developer," she said. "I've got everything invested in this building so I really want to make it work."