

Century-old former Syracuse knitting mill to be turned into apartments







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The former Oak Knitting Mill at 102 W. Division St. in Syracuse would be transformed into 38 apartments and 5,000 square feet of office space under a development proposal by Timothy Lynn and BBL Construction.

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Syracuse, N.Y. — A 116-year-old former knitting mill, one of the last industrial buildings in the Franklin Square area yet to be redeveloped, is slated to be turned into 38 apartments and 5,000 square feet of office space.

Attorney Timothy Lynn said he hopes to begin a \$9.7 million transformation of the former Oak Knitting Co. building at 102 W. Division St. in November and complete the project by September of 2017. He plans to name it Oak Knitting Mill.



Timothy Lynn stands inside the former Oak

Knitting Co. building at 102 W. Division St. in Syracuse. Lynn and BBL Construction Services, of Albany, plan to redevelop the former mill into 38 apartments and 5,000 square feet of office space. *Rick Moriarty / rmoriarty@syracuse.com*

Lynn's partner in the project is BBL Construction, of Albany, which also was one of his partners in the redevelopment of the historic former [C.G. Meaker Food Co. warehouse](#) at 538 Erie Blvd. W. into 33 apartments and office space.

Oak Knitting Mill Commons LLC, a real estate entity formed by Lynn and BBL Construction, bought the property in January from Expressway Properties LLC for \$1.5 million and has applied to the Syracuse Industrial Development Agency for sales, mortgage recording and property tax exemptions for the project.

The apartments (20 one-bedroom, 18 two-bedroom) will feature large windows, ceiling heights up to 13.5 feet, and exposed brick walls and wooden support beams and posts. For fire-rating purposes, the building's hardwood floors will be replaced by tile.

The apartments also will come with granite countertops and stainless steel appliances. There will be onsite parking for 52 vehicles, enough for both the residential and office tenants. Tenants will have access to an outdoor deck.

Monthly rents will range from about \$1,250 to \$1,750, Lynn said.

The building is among the first of many industrial buildings constructed on the reclaimed salt flats in the northwest section of Syracuse following the decline of the city's salt industry.

In September, the state Board for Historic Preservation recommended the building be placed on the [State and National Registers of Historic Places](#), a designation that would make its redevelopment eligible for state and federal tax credits.

Two local businessmen, Charles E. Crouse and Adolph G. Velasko, opened the mill in February 1900 at the northwest corner of West Division Street and Genant Drive for the production of knit underwear. It was the third such mill in Syracuse, following the founding of the Clinton Knitting Co. in 1893 and West Brothers Manufacturers in 1894. Many others followed.

Designed by famed Syracuse architect Archimedes Russell, the mill employed 80 people when it opened. The ladies' knit underwear made at the mill proved to be so popular that the mill was almost immediately expanded, with a three-story addition to the west side of the building opening in January 1901. By 1903, the mill employed 150 people, most of them women.

In 1927, Oak Knitting joined many other northern textile and knitting companies moving south to be closer to where their raw material, cotton, was grown and to take advantage of lower wages. It packed up its knitting machinery and moved to Atlanta.

After the mill closed, the building was expanded several more times, the last time in 1940, and was used for many years as a warehouse. Among its tenants was the American Stores Co., which operated a chain of supermarkets and used the building to store groceries from 1931 to 1955.

William Birchenough Sr. bought the building in 1960, using a portion of it to house his packaging company, Weather Products Dynamic Pak, and leasing the rest of it as warehouse space.

In 2001, a portion of the building was renovated for use as offices. Until recently, its tenants included Dynamic Pak, the Onondaga Environmental Institute, Monaghan Medical and Appel Osborne Landscape Architecture. It is currently vacant.

Though it's the newest part of the building, the 1940 steel-framed addition on the north side of the building has structural problems and will be demolished as part of the redevelopment, Lynn said.

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