



Plans outlined for Drew site

by Mark Gabriel

(Photo caption) Chuck Hubbard/staff photo—THE AMERICAN DREW Furniture Co. plant will be largely demolished under a new redevelopment plan, allowing Independent Avenue, at the bottom of the photo, to be extended across the site to intersect with D Street.

The North Wilkesboro Board of Commissioners agreed Thursday to hold a public hearing at its next meeting on a proposed plan to redevelop the former American Drew Furniture Company plant adjacent to the CBD Loop and Wilkesboro Avenue.

The public hearing will be held Tuesday, Aug. 4 at 7 p.m. at town hall. The proposal will be available for review until then at North Wilkesboro Town Hall.

"Can you imagine what the town would look like without those buildings there?" said Town Manager Hank Perkins after the session Thursday. "It would look completely different than it does now, especially to someone coming into town from the loop."

The plan would call for the demolition and removal of all the former American Drew structures on the 28-acre site, except for the former administration building at the corner of D Street and the CBD Loop, according to plans released at the session.

A company called Block 46 Development LLC—a joint venture between Shepherd Real Estate of North Wilkesboro and The Crown Companies of Dobson—would be responsible for redevelopment at the American Drew site.

Shepherd Real Estate is already under contract with La-Z-Boy Greensboro Inc. to buy the site for that purpose.

However, the plan depends on approval of a "brownfield" agreement with the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources for the site.

A "brownfield" is property set for redevelopment that "may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant," according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency website.

The North Carolina Brownfields Program "provides a mechanism to treat prospective developers of brownfield sites differently than the parties responsible for contaminating them," according to the Natural Resources Department's webpage about the program. "Prospective developers negotiate a brownfields agreement with the program that defines activities needed to make the site suitable for reuse."

The town will use 4.25 acres of the site to build a new fire station and other governmental buildings, according to the plan. Block 46 will develop the rest of the site for commercial use.

After the site is cleared, the town plans to extend Independent Avenue through it, intersecting with D Street, Perkins said. The new fire station would be built at the intersection of the extended Independent Avenue and Main Street, which would be extended across the CBD Loop, he said.

The redevelopment plan depends on whether Block 46 can reach a brownfield agreement with the state Natural Resources Department, Perkins said.

"He's got a year to do that," he said, referring to engineer C. Neil Shepherd of Shepherd Real Estate. "If we haven't got an agreement by then, we won't go forward."

However, Perkins said he's confident the town can finance the \$750,000 needed for the 4.25 acres in its part of the plan.

"We will use some of our fund balance money, or we'll use bank financing, or we'll use a combination of the two," Perkins said.

He said that the prevailing economic conditions at the time the money will be needed would dictate which method the town will use for financing its portion of the plan.